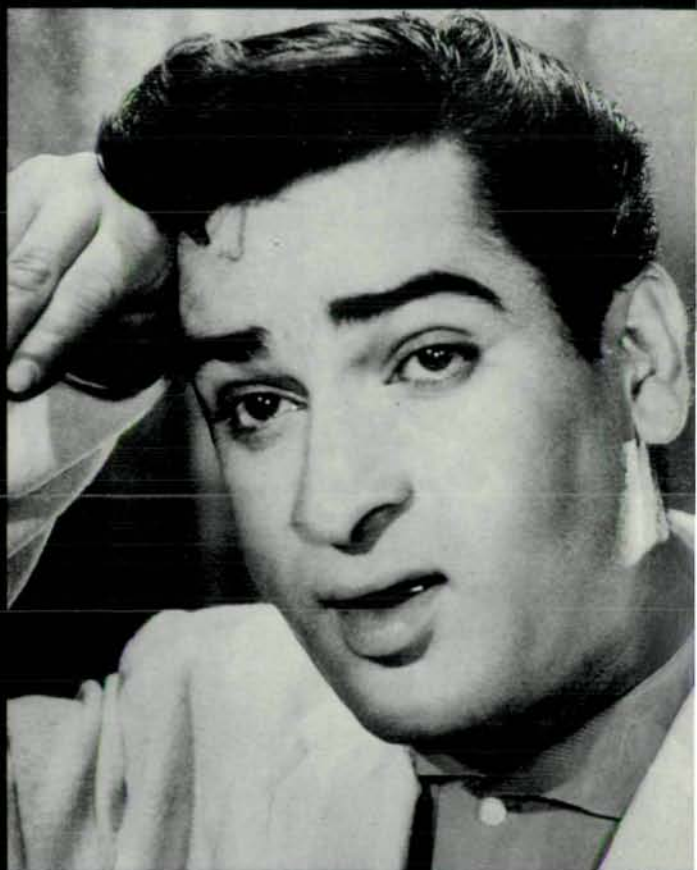


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The spectacular exploding family

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1922 and South African television

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erratum

We would like to apologize for a typesetting error in the following article: Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, 'Magic and wisdom in two portraits by Agnès Varda', *Screen* vol. 34, no. 4, pp. 302–320.

The first line of p. 306 should be moved to become the first line of p. 305. Text from the bottom of p. 304 should read: "... in which fantasy and desire are as much a part of the 'person' as are physical features and remembered events. Of *Jane B.* Varda has said that the overriding question was 'Is there a way to describe or invent Jane Birkin?'"

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***Sylvania Waters* and the spectacular exploding family**

JON STRATTON and IEN ANG

Television, the family and imagined community

The family has been central for television. As a modern cultural institution, television has depended on the idea of the family for its operation. Modern television, epitomized by national broadcast television, has always been constructed around concepts of family entertainment, family drama and, most importantly, the family audience. Even now, television schedules are carefully constructed to offer programmes for the whole family and for all members of the family. Television programmes are also very often *about* the family, taking its normality in modern life for granted and, as part of the circulation of the discourse of the family, helping to shape and reinforce understandings about the family. In this sense, television both reflects and reinforces the modern nation-state's basic reliance on the construct of the family – more precisely, the nuclear family – as the basis for social order, as the site for morality and for the organization of desire. Modern television, in short, was family television – and in some ways the family remains one of the primary preoccupations of (national, broadcast) television.

The intimate connection between television and the family suggests how the two institutions interact – are mutually complicit – in contributing to the construction of a unified national culture in the modern world. Television's integrative power has been deployed in the most private arena of life in the modern nation-state: the family home. Through (modern)

Explaining the family: an
ABC TV magazine
advertisement.

PAUL
*Man, surf and a pregnant de facto. Life's dice don't seem to roll Paul's way -
and at 26 he still can't cope with Laurie as 'Dad'.*

MICHAEL
*Noeline's youngest son. He's having a tough time of it lately -
school pressures, Mum, Laurie and puberty!*

MICK
*Laurie's junior petrol head, no secrets. Loves his wife
Yvette's body as much as his and dad's new race car.*

DIONE
*Laurie loves Paul, but what she'd really
love is a wedding. Mommy's right or maybe after
the baby is born.*

PAT
*The neighbour and
Noeline's bar room
confidant.*

YVETTE
*Mick's wife isn't so keen
on her cute baby and
definitely wants
to lose weight
or should she
just have
another baby?*

LAURIE
*How this son is he?
Laurie is a mature age
petrol head who
loves his toys and Noeline.
Now their cattle is
built they plan to marry
after 15 years of
de facto bliss.*

NOELINE
*Laurie rules the roost
and the bar.
As much as she
tries to keep
her 'Brady Bunch'
family in
harmony, it isn't
always so.
She loves Laurie.*

television, the nation could be forged into an encompassing imagined community in a way which was both much more extensive and intimate than the newspaper: Benedict Anderson's exemplary medium.¹ As the 'unifying rhetorical space of daily television extends into the living rooms of everyone',² the distinction between the public and private spheres has been collapsing. Television was itself implicated in this collapse.

But what was once the family home is now something quite different. In *Family Television*, published in 1986, David Morley discussed the place and role of television within the family.³ The family he concerned himself with was the normative family of traditional sociology – the nuclear family. Eighteen families were interviewed for Morley's project. All contained a husband and wife – marriage is very important in sociological definitions of the family – and between two and four children. In only one case are we told that a wife has a daughter and a son from a previous marriage. Thus, Morley's research took the nuclear family as both normal and normative at a time when, in practice, it was coming to exist only as an important part of conservative ideology and, in concert with this, as a nostalgic touchstone for a lost society. In a later paper, Morley has usefully explained his choice for addressing the case of the nuclear family 'as representative of the ideological (if not empirical) heartland of the television

1 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983)

2 Jody Berland, 'Placing Television', *New Formations*, no. 4 (1988), p. 147

3 David Morley, *Family Television* (London: Comedia, 1986)

4 David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 164.

5 This figure comes from Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*, p. 163.

6 Patricia Nollen and Victor Callan, 'Images of the typical Australian family', in Kathleen Funder (ed.), *Images of Australian Families* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1991), p. 21.

7 Michael Gilding, *The Making and Breaking of the Australian family* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), provides a good account of the explosion of the nuclear family in Australia, especially in the section 'Many Australian families'.

8 Christine Gledhill, 'Speculations on the relationship between soap opera and melodrama', *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, vol. 14, no. 1-2 (1992), p. 119.

9 Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), p. 60.

audience'.⁴ This contextualization illuminates the observation that television's homogenizing preoccupation with the family works to exclude or marginalize – at the level of representation – the day-to-day experiences of the majority of television's actual audiences. It is the generation following World War II which marked the period in western countries of maximum hegemony of nuclear family life. Since the late 1960s, however, all western nation-states have seen a steady rise in divorce and single-parent families. By 1990, the nuclear family so beloved by functionalist sociology as the basis of social order had become a minority. Only about 30 percent of households in Britain conform to this classic family type. If we exclude from this category those families where both parents work and only look at those where the father works and the mother stays at home (that is, the perfect ideological structure), the figure declines to 13.8 percent.⁵ In Australia, according to Noller and Callan, about 28 percent of the population live in nuclear families with dependent children.⁶ The majority of people live in a variety of other ways: on their own, in shared situations, as same-sex couples, as single mothers or fathers – again sometimes sharing, or remarried, or *de facto*, in blended family situations.⁷ The nuclear family has exploded.

Paralleling this explosion has been a resurgence of interest in family melodrama in television soap opera. Christine Gledhill has argued that, 'If [the] potentiality for the melodramatic lay dormant while fifties family melodrama in the cinema carried the brunt of the growing pressure on gender roles, the seventies and eighties saw a renewed search in popular fictional forms for enacting heterosexual and family crisis'.⁸ Gledhill's point refers to changing gender relations, but the crisis of the nuclear family was qualitatively more profound: the very idea of family itself was being questioned, losing its uncontested ideological power. The soap opera, in its traditional formulation the site of women's culture, was also where family values were asserted and rehearsed. As Christine Geraghty has noted, 'the basis of soap operas is family life',⁹ even if perfect nuclear families are more often than not absent in soap narratives – British, Australian or American. Indeed, one of the central problematics of soap opera as a genre, as well as a reason for its popularity and success, may be found in the way in which it upholds, against all odds, the ideal of the family. As soap characters struggle along, they continue to yearn for the utopia of the perfect family – where we project happiness and a sense of belonging – despite its harsh, less than perfect empirical reality, to which the soaps testify. Soaps, then, are vehicles for reconciling the ideal and the real, or better, for keeping the ideal alive by concentrating on the dramatic imperfections of the real. In this sense, soap opera traditionally constructs 'real' family life as lacking, even if it is

the only thing that we have. Against the – unimaginable, impossible – ideal that is the ideology of nuclear family life as portrayed for example in television advertisements, actual family life is always found wanting. At the same time, it is ultimately what we want.

As the nuclear family exploded, the soap opera was torn in different directions. In one transformation it became a prime-time show concerned not only with the family but also with power, wealth, pleasure, leisure and sex as opposed to love. *Dallas* and *Dynasty* epitomize these shows. In another transformation, melodrama was played down and shows like *Neighbours* became nostalgic evocations of a mythical post-World War II period when the practices and values of the nuclear family were uncontested. In a third, much rarer, transformation the nuclear family and its ideological repertoire of moral values vanished from the soap opera completely, leaving it fundamentally changed. We have discussed this development elsewhere in relation to the Australian soap opera *Chances*.¹⁰ These transformations in soap opera signal the increasing difficulty the genre has in performing its traditionally reassuring role: that is to represent *unproblematically* the ultimate viability of an everyday world held together by a moral repertoire centred around family values.

All this provides a general context for the significance of the screening on Australian television of *Sylvania Waters*, a programme which was claimed to be a documentary series featuring the day-to-day life of a real Sydney family. A crew filmed this family, warts and all, for ninety hours over a six month period, and the programme was shown in twelve weekly half-hour episodes from July 1992 on ABC television, the Australian national public broadcaster. It should be noted that *Sylvania Waters* has British, not Australian origins. Its production was an initiative of the BBC, in coproduction with the ABC. But the series was shown in Australia before it was shown in Britain. Part of the peculiarity of the programme, then, was that it was a British documentary series about an Australian family, designed for a British audience but watched by an Australian audience first.

Sylvania Waters immediately became an object of heated national debate in Australia, and the intensity of the controversy sparked by it (about which more later) was related precisely to the programme's presentation as a representative investigation of the lifestyle of an ordinary Australian family – a family which could be held up as a symbolic mirror to the Australian nation. In this sense, *Sylvania Waters* epitomized the national articulation of family and television we discussed above. But with a difference. While the modern version of this articulation signals a strengthening of the hegemonic unity of family and nation

10 Ien Ang and Jon Stratton, 'The end of civilisation as we knew it: *Chances* and the postrealist soap opera', in Robert C. Allen (ed.), *As The World Turns: Soap Opera Worldwide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming 1994).

through television, its postmodern transformation – which we would suggest is the case with *Sylvania Waters* – signals, if not the breakdown of that hegemony, then at least the *problem* television now has in holding the increasingly mythical family, and therefore the increasingly problematized, modern homogeneous nation, together. Related to this is the more general problem of the status of television in relation to the family as the privatized nuclear family exploded.

While *Sylvania Waters* was supposed to be a documentary, from the very beginning it was presented with explicit reference to the soap opera. When the producers were searching for a suitable family during the preparation period, they distributed a flyer throughout Sydney which interpellated people thus:

Any dramas in your house? We are seeking a family whose children cover a wide range of ages and interests. A lively family, with something to say, who are willing to let us into their lives. Let us see how the 'average' Australian family lives. Better than a soapie, this is real life.¹¹

¹¹ Quoted in Philip McLean, 'Sylvania Waters', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 12 July 1992.

As we will explore in this article, it is the soap operatic articulations of *Sylvania Waters* which make the programme a fundamentally ambiguous statement about 'family' and 'television' in contemporary society.

The very title of the programme follows the (predominantly British) soap convention of using the name of a fictional local community to construct a sense of place. The British connection is not arbitrary here. *Sylvania Waters* is a nouveau riche Sydney suburb which looks and feels utterly exotic from a British point of view. The fact that this was the location where the disturbing unraveling of the family was being dramatized, means that *Sylvania Waters*, constructed as a world resolutely outside of British space, can be taken, from a British perspective, as having nothing to do with British reality. Moreover, more than any other British settler state, excepting the special instance of the USA, Australia has been constructed in Britain as an antipodean, exotic Other, a colonized alternative into which British dreams and nightmares, hopes and fears, could be read. British audiences were therefore given the luxury of an opportunity to revel voyeuristically in a world from which they could assume to be exempted. Australian audiences, however, watched a programme which claimed to show them a version of themselves. As a consequence, they were forced to confront and question many of the traditional ideological tenets of modernity which we have outlined. In practical terms, these were summed up in the problem of how to represent 'the Australian family'. However, as a cultural event, *Sylvania Waters* unwound many more far-reaching modern assumptions, ranging from television's claim

to realism to the position of television in the experience of family life, in a time when the distinction between public and private spheres, historically divided by the family, has all but disappeared, and when the family itself has exploded. What was private and not, therefore, for public display – namely, intimate family life – has now become the subject of everyday television. It is the very explosion of the family which has enabled this spectacularization to take place. At the same time, the televisual spectacularization of the family has also contributed to its explosion by displaying the non-normativeness of the apparently most normative family. All these considerations make *Sylvania Waters* a suitable anchor for a discussion about the current, postmodern disarticulation of television, family and nation.

Australian anxiety, British conceit

The Australianness of the *Sylvania Waters* family was taken to be beyond doubt. As the Sydney-based *Sunday Telegraph* observed, '[w]hile the Donahers are a couple with a family and lifestyle perhaps not typically Australian, they are all-Australian'.¹² What then is the alleged Australianness constructed in *Sylvania Waters*? And why did it create such a fuss?

In the first place, what is being played out here are the postcolonial complexities of the relationship between Australia and Britain. As the decline of the British empire has become an increasingly unavoidable fact in the daily experience of the British themselves, recently emphasized by the prolonged recession/depression in the post-Thatcher era, the ex-colony Down Under has become a focus for fantasies of a better life. The success of *Neighbours* in Britain can be understood in this light. The positive British myth of Australia is that it is a sunny Anglo-colony with a transplanted British culture. This is coupled with a belief that Australia is somewhat backward and old-fashioned in its way of life. From this point of view, *Neighbours* – a soap opera whose appeal resides in its construction of, as Stephen Crofts puts it, a sense of 'good neighbourliness and wholesome, traditional, suburban values [based upon] the moral certainties of hard work, decency and compassion'¹³ – could be misrecognized as actually representing real life in Australia. Thus, Crofts refers to a television programme about Australian suburbia in which a British emigrant, 'relocated, and unemployed, in an outer Brisbane suburb, [blames] *Neighbours* for having misled him to Australia'.¹⁴ Most Australians will of course be aware that the world of *Neighbours* does not correspond with contemporary empirical Australian reality. As Barbara Angell, script editor for

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Stephen Crofts, 'Why the *Neighbours* phenomenon in Britain?', in Robert C. Allen (ed.), *As The World Turns: Soap Opera Worldwide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming 1994).

¹⁴ Ibid.

15 In Couchman on Soaps, ABC Television, September 1992.

Neighbours once remarked, 'We deliberately set *Neighbours* somewhere back in the past. We're not really trying to be of today'.¹⁵

Of course, from a British perspective this construction will not necessarily be perceived as such. For one thing, the afternoon and, more recently, early evening time slots for *Neighbours* on British television present the serial as one specifically targeted at teenagers. However, while it may be the case that many adult viewers in Britain have a fairly distanced and reflexive relationship to the programme, the appeal of its image is nevertheless illustrated in the emulation of some of its features in the recent BBC soap opera *Eldorado*. These include not only the emphasis on sun, leisure and young people, but the feeling of a community 'out of time', an experience played out in *Eldorado* by a fictional (British) community out of place (on the Spanish Costa del Sol). Similarly, the realist illusion engendered by *Neighbours* may give its British audience a hope that their nostalgia for 'the world we have lost' might still be satisfied in a real, other place. Ironically, it was in the 1950s and 1960s – presumably the time of the imaginary past Angell refers to in relation to *Neighbours* – that Australia was portrayed as the land of opportunity for the potential British migrant. This postimperialist nostalgia may be one important explanation for the phenomenal success of Australian soap operas such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* among British television audiences.

To all intents and purposes, the BBC's idea to produce *Sylvania Waters* can be seen in the light of this success. The series was made with the stated intention to find out what life in an Australian suburb was *really* like, that is, to put on 'a new, REAL LIFE, version of *Neighbours*'.¹⁶ This quotation comes from a British newspaper, the *Sunday Mirror*. Here we can see how Australia's own myth of its past is being reconstructed in Britain today as its present. *Sylvania Waters* and *Neighbours* are then understood to share the same terrain of the present: *Sylvania Waters* is just the 'real' counterpart to the fictional *Neighbours*; they are both, from a British point of view, quintessentially Australian. In textual terms, there is collusion here between the documentary and the soap opera, something made explicit by Susan Ardill in the following manner:

Only two or three times across the twelve episodes [of *Sylvania Waters*] is anyone seen commenting on any aspect of life outside The Family. Instead, this is a world of petty domestic jealousies, hatreds and intrigues. In a space just off screen we can't help but extrapolate to some notion of an Australian society which succours them in their attitudes and behaviours. *Sylvania Waters* resolutely refuses to furnish any wider material

16 Rachel Wood, 'The Real Life Neighbours!', *Sunday Mirror*, 26 July 1992.

17 Susan Ardill, 'My Sylvania Waters', *Editions: Australian and International Books and Ideas*, no. 14, (1992), p. 12.

which can help us think about Australianess. The ongoing effect is beginning to be very much like watching *Neighbours*, really.¹⁷

We will expand below on the implications of the documentary/soap opera double-coding of *Sylvania Waters*. At this point, we want to note that the absence of any specific political, economic or indeed nonfamilial or community-based concerns and references – which is a narrative strategy characteristic of the soap opera genre – makes it possible for both *Neighbours* and *Sylvania Waters* to become blanks on which British fantasies of Australia can be configured. The difference is that while *Neighbours* tends to represent a utopia – a utopia of ordinariness and normality, with family values fully in place – *Sylvania Waters* is taken to represent a dystopia: a contemporary Australian life as excessive, out of control. This, at least, is the Australian anxiety about the British reception of *Sylvania Waters*.

Australian–British relations are problematic for Australians in a very different way than for the British. The Australian cultural formation is heavily concerned with its own national cultural identity: a concern which originates in Australia's status as an ex-settler colony, a relatively new nation–state with an ambiguous and contested history and, by the early nineties, a fundamentally uncertain future (economic as well as cultural) in a rapidly changing global environment. In light of this, it is significant that one of the major criticisms voiced about *Sylvania Waters* in Australia was cast as a worry about its potentially harmful effect on 'Australia's reputation overseas' – or to be more specific, on Australia's reputation in Britain, the ex-Mother Country which has remained, to this day, Australia's most significant Other. After all, *Sylvania Waters* was made to be shown by the BBC on British television. It was the British newspaper *The Independent* which reported in the first week of the series' showing on Australian television that '*Sylvania Waters* has caused a furore and is criticised as likely to do more damage to Anglo-Australian relations than anything since Gallipoli'.¹⁸

18 Robert Milliken, 'TV family saga offends sensitive Australians', *The Independent*, July 1992.

Ardill, an Australian expatriate who had lived in London for ten years, had just returned to Sydney when *Sylvania Waters* began. She kept a diary of her week-by-week reactions to the series which was subsequently published. The series, she said, made her 'come back to earth in the southern hemisphere with a bump'. Her in-between position as 'returnee' made her particularly sensitive to the postimperial/postcolonial predicament in Australia. Frustrated by the amount of second guessing in Australia about 'how the British are going to see "us"', she questioned the derivative nature of *Sylvania Waters*' projected significance in the Australian context:

For the BBC, bemused broadcaster of high-rating Australian soaps, to go on to make a *documentary* series about an Australian family . . . was a very smart move. . . . *Sylvania Waters* is a heavily packaged slice of Australian life. On British television it will make perfect programming sense.

But what is the ABC doing in all this? What was in it for them? What were their intentions? Unlike the BBC, they don't actually screen any of the blockbuster soaps. Those soaps must play at least a slightly different role here for an Australian audience. So what was the ABC aiming for, in contributing and showing *Sylvania Waters*? Was this a retort to the commercial networks? An observation about Australian society (made by two British directors)? Or had they bought the British agenda so wholesale that they were happy to lie back and bask in the reflected glory and controversy, without any coherent vision on their own part, other than to get an audience?¹⁹

¹⁹ Ardill, 'My Sylvania Waters', p. 12.

The questions Ardill asks about the relevance of *Sylvania Waters* in the Australian context are intriguing, and the very fact that there seem to be no ready answers available to them suggests that the British agenda was at least not questioned by the Australian producers. This is compounded by the fact that in the public debate that erupted in Australia, it was Paul Watson, the British executive producer, who defended the programme, not one of his Australian colleagues: an awkward situation, which alone would already be enough to trace a neocolonial motif in the whole *Sylvania Waters* project. As a result, this 'fly-on-the-wall look at the life of a genuine Aussie family and their friends'²⁰ which implied an objectification of Australianness for a British audience, could only become a vehicle for *self-surveillance*, *self-objectification*, for an Australian audience. Or to put it differently, while from a British point of view *Sylvania Waters* can be taken for a representation of an object which is real yet other, in the Australian context the distinction between self and other, subject and object, could not be so easily maintained, signalling the entry of *Sylvania Waters* into a simulatory scheme of things, to use Baudrillard's term. We will return to this below.

As television has historically been central to the rhetorical articulation of 'the family' in the construction of the national imagined community, it is not surprising that it was the perceived (lack of) realism of the series which was the major concern in the reception of *Sylvania Waters* by Australian audiences. The British *Independent* reported an opinion poll finding that 85 per cent of those questioned said that the programme 'was not a fair representation of family life in Australia'.²¹ Executive producer Paul Watson claims that the issues highlighted in

²⁰ Wood, 'The Real Life Neighbours'.

²¹ Milliken, 'TV family saga'.

²² Interviewed in *Lateline*, ABC-TV, 6 October 1992.

²³ In the television programme *Hard Copy*, quoted in Ardill, 'My *Sylvania Waters*', p. 13.

²⁴ Watson, in *Lateline*.

²⁵ Hugh Mackay, *Reinventing Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1993), p. 64.

Sylvania Waters – he mentions birth, marriage, underlying tensions, stepchildren, differences in wealth, areas of dissent – are 'natural and known to many, many families'.²² In other words, these are issues that most of us are supposed to recognize and identify with, as family is presumably what we have in common. However, many Australian viewers were seriously offended by the programme, presumably because the Baker–Donahers were depicted as a bunch of quarrelsome people with materialistic, uncultured and racist values. There was nothing 'normal' about them; they were not even a nuclear family! By the end of the series, even the leading couple of the starring family itself, Noeline Baker and Laurie Donaher, displayed outrage over the, in their view, distorted picture of their lives constructed in the programme. Laurie Donaher's verdict was that 'the BBC have made mugs out of an Australian family'.²³

But Watson was unperturbed. He declared that he has chosen to focus on the family in his documentation of contemporary society 'because it is the most important unit we live with in this world'.²⁴ This, of course, is a standard *modern* statement whose truth value has become increasingly problematic. He went on to say that the programme is: 'a serious look at contemporary life, the natural problems and plusses in them. Life is a bitch at the moment and it's difficult. The struggles are there, and we wanted to show all that.' Many of the struggles are ironically occasioned by living in a world in which the nuclear family has lost its normativity in structural terms, whilst the dominant ideology and social practices of the society continue to privilege its values. This echoes the contradiction involved in the clinging to a family ideal in a time when its reality is becoming ever more unstable, as observed by Hugh Mackay in *Reinventing Australia*, his recent study of the current Australian state of mind:

As the reality of family life becomes less stable, the ideal seems to become even more attractive. . . . Given this exalted view of family life in the Australian community, it is hardly surprising that one of the most significant sources of anxiety for contemporary Australians concerns the widespread breakdown of family life.²⁵

This helps to explain why most Australians were apparently not prepared to see themselves in *Sylvania Waters*. In this sense, the controversy around the show triggered a sense of crisis over Australianness; it glaringly exposed a lack of national consensus about what being Australian means. But this crisis, we want to suggest, whilst in some ways particular to Australia, has a more general historical context. The modern construction of the imagined community of the nation, as we have already suggested, depended on the centrality of the nuclear family. Its explosion

has provided a background to a much more general questioning of national identity from which Britain has not been immune. The fact that a British programme about the crisis of contemporary family life should feature an Australian, not a British family, therefore suggests a politics of disavowal. After all, the explosion of the nuclear family also took place in Britain.

Watson had made a similar programme in Britain in 1974, which was simply called *The Family*, a title signalling utter confidence in its objective, documentary representation, in contrast with the soap operatic connotations of *Sylvania Waters*. However, the differences between the two series go much further than this, marking the gap, as well as the dynamic relationship, between two different times – 1974 and 1992 – and two different spaces – Britain and Australia. The difference between ‘Britain 1974’ and ‘Australia 1992’ can be described in terms of an increasing uncertainty about the facts of life, about what kind of society we (should) live in. The breakdown of the nuclear family is central in this. In the early 1970s, it was still possible for television to represent the family to itself in the family home, as was the assumption in modernity. By the 1990s, there is neither a normative family to represent nor, which amounts to the same thing, a normative family audience to watch the representation. As a consequence, the status of television in the construction of the imagined community has been fundamentally unsettled. The implications of this unsettling are clearly articulated in *Sylvania Waters*.

Television, the family and simulation

What is most significant about *Sylvania Waters* is that it does *not* feature a nuclear family. The Baker–Donahers are a complex blended family, consisting of an unmarried middle-aged couple living together in what is known in Australia as a *de facto* arrangement. Both Noeline Baker and Laurie Donaher had been married and their children from these marriages, spread over two additional households, add to this constructed family.²⁶ By the sociological standards of modernity, then, the *Sylvania Waters* family is by no means typical. Laurie Donaher was aware of this: ‘I thought there’s no way they’re going to choose us. . . . we were under the impression that it was a typical Australian family they were after, but we thought we weren’t typical’.²⁷ By the very selection of this particular family, then, *Sylvania Waters* testifies to the explosion of the nuclear family.

But the doing away with the typical also points to a more profound paradox: exposing the idiosyncratic ways of this particular family only leads to a further dissolution of the idea of

²⁶ The inability of nuclear family rhetoric to describe this organization is typified in the variety of names given to the family. Different reports called them the Baker–Donahers, the Donaher–Bakers and the Donahers. Interestingly, but not surprisingly no report seems to have called them the Bakers.

²⁷ Laurie Donaher, quoted in McLean ‘*Sylvania Waters*’.

the family itself. In a different, more experiential rendering of the concept of the typical, Noeline Baker reflects in the last episode of *Sylvania Waters* that 'I think we are quite a typical Australian family. We have our ups; we have lots of the ups and an awful lot of the downs, but basically it's no different to the family over the street.' However, what the controversy around *Sylvania Waters* makes clear is that even if this were the case, no family will turn out to be the same when it comes to *how* they handle their ups and downs. This leads to an undoing of the cultural category of the family itself; what is left is a plurality of events and experiences whose subsumption under a single, encompassing category of 'family life' is at best reductive, at worst nonsensical. 'The family' is exposed as a myth at the very point at which it is brought into the realm of public visibility. In this sense, *Sylvania Waters* is the culmination of a trend towards the spectacularization of the family which, in the western world, started in the early seventies.

It is significant that documentaries aimed at scrutinizing and displaying – rather than explicitly commenting on – family life began just as the nuclear family form went into its period of steep decline. In the USA, where the nuclear family exploded first, a tele-*vérité* documentary using a similar method to *The Family* and *Sylvania Waters* was made of the Louds family in 1971. Baudrillard has described the paradoxical quest for the normative real in this case: 'Seven months of uninterrupted shooting. Three hundred hours of direct nonstop broadcasting, without script or scenario, the odyssey of a family. . .'.²⁸

In 1966, British television screened a four-part naturalistic drama entitled *Talking to a Stranger*, which approached family life from the different points of view of each of the family members.²⁹ In 1971, also in Britain, Ken Loach directed the *vérité* film *Family Life* which was based on RD Laing's ideas about the potentially pathological effects of nuclear families on children. What these events point to is not only a crisis of the nuclear family, but also a crisis of representation. These events were attempts to make the family visible 'as it is', an object of nostalgic anthropological examination. They mark the end of the family as a private, unrepresentable domain, a site whose realness kept it, and was simultaneously a consequence of its being, outside of representational discourse. While television had helped construct the imagined community by representing the public world to the private, unrepresentable family, now television began to (re)present the family to itself. But this project of putting-into-representation of the family is fraught with contradictions. Parallel to the explosion of the nuclear family in social terms, the family as such disappears under the weight of its (re)presentation. In other words, the more attempts are made to present it, the more

²⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 49.

²⁹ We thank John Caughie for drawing our attention to the existence of this series.

30 Baudrillard, *Simulations*,
p. 50.

it turns out there is no such thing as the family that can be represented. The family only exists as a simulation, that is, an imaginary model without a referent in the real: what Baudrillard calls hyperreality.

In commenting on 'the phantasm of filming the Louds *as if TV wasn't there*,' Baudrillard notes: 'The producers' trump card was to say: "They lived as if we weren't there". An absurd, paradoxical formula – neither true, nor false: but utopian. The "as if *we* weren't there" is equivalent to "as if *you* were there".'³⁰

Baudrillard's utopia can be interpreted in two distinctive ways. The more traditional, modern one refers to the naturalistic fallacy – the realist illusion – which treats the medium as transparent, leading to a mistaking of the representation for the real. In this case, 'as if *you* were there' implies the positioning of the audience as flies on the wall, having immediate access to the object of representation – the life of this particular family. But this scenario still retains the distinction between subject and object, as well as the real and the representation. A more radical, postmodern utopia, if we want to call it that, would highlight the 'as if': the exposed family simulates its own life as though they were in the spotlights of the cameras and we, the audience, participate in this simulation in a kind of 'thrill of the real'. The distance of perspective – marked by the separation of subject and object, of seer and seen – is being lost and, as part of this loss, it becomes impossible to distinguish acting from natural, daily life, the representation from the real. It is in this simulatory logic that the family can be seen never to have existed without the abstracting distance of representation. Once it was drawn into the regime of excessive transparency, of unmediated presentation, it can no longer cohere as the family. As Baudrillard has put it in relation to the Louds in the American context:

This family was in any case already somewhat hyperreal by its very selection: a typical, California-housed, three-garage, five-children, well-to-do professional upper middle-class ideal American family with an ornamental housewife. In a way, it is this statistical perfection which dooms it to death. This ideal heroine of the American way of life is chosen, as in sacrificial rites, to be glorified and to die under the fiery glare of the studio lights, a modern fatum. . . . So it is really a question of sacrificial process, of a sacrificial spectacle offered to twenty million Americans. The liturgical drama of a mass society.³¹

31 Ibid., p. 51.

The Louds programme signalled the death of the typical American family, and as such it also marked the postmodern fragmentation of American society which became definitive in the

early seventies. From then on, the United States had to do without the nuclear family as the homogenizing focal point of the 'American way of life', despite attempts by conservatives even into the 1990s to assert 'family values' as the basis for Americanness.

The British context is different. As it is an old European nation-state, the traditional tenets of modernity are much more entrenched than in the settler societies of either the USA or Australia. From the perspective of modernity, the disturbing truth of the exploding nuclear family has to be kept at bay. It is for this reason that the reality of the family continues to be stubbornly asserted, precisely by attempting to (re)present it as it is. However, while this strategy of disavowal could still work for 'Britain 1974', as we will indicate in relation to *The Family*, it has become much more problematic for 'Australia 1992', as *Sylvania Waters* testifies.

The British production of *The Family* in 1974 could still just take the structural dominance of the nuclear family for granted, while uncovering the emotional entanglements of family life. In contrast with *Sylvania Waters*, *The Family* securely featured one nuclear family, the Wilkins family from Reading. The documentary was made at the end of a decade which had begun with an outpouring of British films about working-class family life such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *A Taste of Honey* (1961) and *Billy Liar* (1963).³² But *The Family* was documentary rather than fiction, it strove to present the real rather than merely represent it, and as such it was the pinnacle of objectifying fetishization. Nevertheless, the working-classness of the Wilkins provided a distantiating from the dominant, bourgeois ideology of the nuclear family which ensured that the reality made visible in the documentary did not affect the normative value of the dominant, middle-class family. In other words, *The Family* can be seen as a British middle-class construction of the working-class family as Other, saving the middle-class family from the ordeal of self-representation which would threaten to expose its own status as simulation, a hyperreality without bearings in the real.

This strategy of disavowal was supported textually by the way in which the programme confirmed the nuclear family as the normative family form. One of the central narrative lines in *The Family* was Mrs Wilkins's constant, insistent attempts to persuade reluctant Tom, her eldest daughter's long-term boyfriend, finally to agree to marry Marion. What this signifies is an overwhelming desire on the mother's part, on behalf of Marion, to secure a sense of respectability – marked by marriage – for her daughter. The climax of *The Family* over its twelve episodes was in episode eleven when Tom and Marion do indeed get married.

³² These films are well documented in John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism British Cinema 1956–1963* (London: BFI, 1986), esp. chapters 6 and 7.

Ideologically, then, the effect of Marion and Tom's wedding was to signal the reproduction of the nuclear family. This is a reassuring, redemptive ending: even working-class families can successfully strive towards middle-class normality. This reflects the continuity of the British national project, in place since the nineteenth century, of making the working class respectable by transforming their relationships into nuclear families. In this sense, *The Family* could successfully be appropriated as a realistic (re)presentation of the normative family, and therefore operate as a rhetorical vindication of its reality. It is true that when *The Family* was shown on British television, many viewers found the Wilkins not a normal family. Such a reading would be logical given the argument we are putting forward here. The point is, however, that regardless of the identification made by viewers with the actual family, the programme's point of view articulated a normative, and conservative, ideology of the family.

In *Sylvania Waters*, redemption is much more ambiguous. Made in 1992, the non-normative Other could no longer be located within Britain, but had to be transposed far outside it, so as to minimize the danger it would pose for the integrity of the national self. Even so, the nuclear family still figures ideologically in the narrative trajectory of *Sylvania Waters* as an ideal, fostered in the text by overlaying its documentary material with a soap opera coding. On the other hand, as we shall see, the corollary of this soap operatic articulation is also that the perception of *Sylvania Waters* as (re)presentation of 'the family' was undercut. Instead, the programme exposes the simulacrum status of the family and, as we shall see, the response of Australian audiences, faced with an unsolicited model of themselves, is caught within this quandary: between a conservative search for a representation of the family ideal on the one hand, and an acceptance of the simulacrum nature of the spectacularized family on the other.

The family spectacle

At the beginning of *Sylvania Waters*, two of the three couples are living together without being married: Noeline and Laurie, and also the next generation, Noeline's son Paul and his girlfriend Dione. (Laurie's son Mick and his partner Yvette *are* married, but it is significant that their role is marginalized in the narrative; Ardill described them as 'essentially boring'.) As in *The Family*, the younger generation gets married in episode eleven, which documents Paul and Dione's wedding day. However, the narrative finale of the series is the prospective marriage of Noeline and Laurie who, in the last episode, fly off to Europe for a holiday with the intention of getting married there. In *The Family* the

Wilkins parents are, of course, already married; the normality of the nuclear family was therefore never in doubt in this series. By contrast, *Sylvania Waters* starts out with the crisis of the family, and ends with a movement towards its reinstatement – although we never get to know in the series whether Noeline and Laurie actually do get married in Europe.

It is through Paul and Dione that the ideology of the family is most explicitly articulated. Throughout the series they profess their happiness with each other in spite of their fights, and constantly assert their desire to stay together. When their baby, Kane, is born (in episode two) they both assert that, coming from broken and alcoholic homes, they each know what it is like not to have a proper family. As a consequence they will stay together for Kane's sake no matter what. The ideological effect of the opposition between Noeline and Laurie's relationship and Paul and Dione's is to increase conservative and nostalgic sympathy for Paul and Dione. Paul and Dione's statements about their families offer a critical reading of Noeline and Laurie because of their implied inability to hold their own marriages together and their commitment to such a project.

Australian audiences³³ were apparently all too ready to buy into this construction, as Paul and Dione quickly became the favourite characters of the programme. They were constructed as the good guys, as opposed to Noeline and Laurie who became the bad guys, of *Sylvania Waters*. Paul and Dione are constructed as average, and they become more average as the series goes on, with Kane's birth and their marriage. They appear to be normal, the empirical embodiment of the modern preoccupation with the normative. We have already discussed the historical importance of soap opera as an ideological site for the reinforcement of the normativeness of the modern family ideal. Mainstream Australian soap operas such as *Neighbours*, as we have argued elsewhere,³⁴ rely heavily on the construction of averageness, because the average is the lived experience of the normative and the normal. The reading of Paul and Dione as average colludes with the nostalgic ideology of these soaps, enabling them to be seen as representative of the utopian Australian imagined community. As Greg Stevens, story editor of *Home and Away*, has said: 'We work very hard at pushing an image of the battler because I don't think Australians like rich people and the fact that Dione and Paul have become the heroes of *Sylvania Waters* is because they're seen as battlers. I think Australians have a natural distrust of people with money.'³⁵ Paul and Dione can be read as Aussie battlers, ordinary people struggling to make a living and survive whilst embracing the dominant repertoire of family values. As Dione said in the last episode, 'We're a family now, I'm a family woman, Paul is a family man'. Paul goes to work each

³³ Of course, the Australian audience is by no means a homogeneous entity. While there was no class-oriented criticism, (reflecting perhaps the hegemony of the ideology of the nuclear family and the pervasiveness of the Australian myth of egalitarianism) criticism of *Sylvania Waters* did come from ethnic communities, who denounced the fact that an Angloceltic family had been selected as 'typical Australian family'. However, this criticism still remains within the order of representation: it assumes that the programme represents, rather than simulates, Australianness.

³⁴ See Ang and Stratton, 'The end of civilisation'.

³⁵ In *Couchman on soaps*.

day for Telecom. Dione, who used to work, now minds the house and, in time, the baby. They fight, yes; but, against all the odds, they will stay together because they love each other. They provide for a nostalgic reading of how things used to be, and offer the hope that things might still be that way. They are youngish, reasonably likeable and reasonably attractive – nothing excessive. They are the *Neighbours* family for real. Ross Newton, an actor in *Home and Away*, puts the collusion constructed between fiction and reality like this: ‘. . . my character plays a similar type of character to Paul, who is a battler, who is trying to pay off a mortgage and so forth so the storylines are very, very similar, except I’m acting but this is real life. . . . Paul is a battler and I’m playing a battler. So I mean, I think the scripts that we do are pretty true to life actually. Which is great.’

Compared with Paul and Dione, Noeline and Laurie are evidently extremely affluent. Their expansive home is valued at \$1 million, they own a Mercedes Benz, and moored in the canal at the front of their house is a luxury motor cruiser. The series makes every effort to highlight this material wealth; for example, in episode four we see Laurie shop around for a doctor who will pass him as fit to drive his \$45,000 racing car. Although they both claim working-class backgrounds, their upward socioeconomic mobility, which is a consequence of the success of their contract labour hire business (although in the series we never get to know *how* they could have earned so much money), places them as extraordinarily prosperous when compared to the fantasy of the average as embodied by Paul and Dione. One of the ongoing narrative tensions in the series revolves around Noeline’s refusal to give Paul and Dione any money, arguing that they must learn to stand on their own feet whilst continually interfering in their lives in other ways. Noeline and Laurie’s wealth is thus contrasted with the relative poverty of Paul and Dione. From within this discursive structure Noeline and Laurie’s wealth seems out of order: they are not average, but excessive. This excessiveness is encoded in overwhelmingly negative terms in the series. Noeline and Laurie are too rich, and do not know how to be rich gracefully. In this sense they are much more like the traumatized, melodramatic families of *Dallas* and *Dynasty* where wealth is associated with constant trouble. Excess is a characteristic feature of the melodramatic and the visible, material excessiveness of Noeline and Laurie, contrasted with the nostalgic ‘normality’ of Paul and Dione, helps to reinforce their construction as the bad guys, disrupting the utopian imagined community.

It is Noeline who is constructed as the dominant excessive figure in *Sylvania Waters*. The series highlights her arguments with Laurie. In these arguments she tends to be standing, he

tends to be seated; she tends to be foregrounded, he tends to be backgrounded. The effect of the editing of the series is to offer a reading of their relationship as being based on mutual misunderstanding, and aggression on the part of Noeline. Laurie, on the other hand, is constructed as weak and unable and unwilling to control his excessive *de facto* wife. This raucous image of domesticity is the opposite of the traditional ideology of love, mutual support and female moral control over the family within the confines of a generalized patriarchal authority. In the last episode, Laurie objected to some of Noeline's relatives staying in their house while they were away for the weekend. At least one third of the episode was spent on showing the huge argument that transpired as a result of Noeline's subversion of Laurie's patriarchal power. In the context of the ideology of the modern nuclear family, then, Noeline's behaviour is constructed as antithetical to proper wifely behaviour.

The significance of this construction of Noeline can be understood more fully by placing her character in the light of the double coding of *Sylvania Waters* as a text combining documentary techniques with the narrative concerns of the soap opera. Christine Geraghty has noted in relation to British soaps such as *Coronation Street* and *Eastenders*, which she calls matriarchal soaps, that 'the mother takes on the burden of being both the moral and practical support to the family'.³⁶ From this perspective Noeline is constructed as the soap villain, the character viewers love to hate. Noeline is presented as an archaic image of the world turned upside down. Where she should be subordinate to her husband she has not even remarried; she dominates Laurie, and instead of functioning as the nurturing and mediating centre of a harmonious household, she argues with everybody. She is extraordinarily emotional, marking her as the text's key melodramatic site.

Moreover, the series implies that Noeline drinks too much and smokes too much – measured against the moderation of everyday normality. Furthermore, one episode of the series shows her having a party at her house with a group of female friends. They have employed a black male stripper. In this episode pleasure is associated not only with excessive drinking and smoking, but also with sex. As the good soap matriarch, Noeline would have been expected to be caring and self-denying, but here she is portrayed as a drama queen who in addition to her other sins of melodramatic excess is also sexually excessive. It is no wonder that, as the villainous mother with almost camp qualities, Noeline is said to have developed a significant following in Australia's gay community, much like Joan Collins/Alexis Colby of *Dynasty*. However, while from this perspective Noeline could be celebrated as a transgressive force, the traditional ideology of the family was

³⁶ Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera*, p. 75.

37 Quoted in Jane Fraser, 'Noeline's tale of troubled waters up for sale', *The Weekend Australian*, 10/11 October 1992.

38 Mark Poster, 'Introduction' in M. Poster (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Readings*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 6.

39 Philip McLean, 'Sylvania Waters', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 12 July 1992.

40 Kevin Sadlier, 'Family bares all for TV', *The Sun-Herald*, 12 July 1992.

asserted by other voices, including some leading politicians, who denounced her for her non-normative behaviour. This is not how mainstream Australia wants to imagine itself. As Noeline Baker herself said after the series had ended, 'I was nearly ostracised. I felt like an outcast. It was very, very heavy.'³⁷

But while the soap opera coding reinforced a conservative preferred reading of *Sylvania Waters*, the crossreferences to soap opera in the whole event simultaneously point to something more fundamental, namely, that while *Sylvania Waters* was designed to (re)present the family, what took place was its spectacularization. As the family only exists as a simulation today, its reality can only take the form of a spectacle. The effect of this is a blurring of the real and the fictional. As Mark Poster has explained, '[a] simulation is different from a fiction or lie in that it not only presents an absence as a presence, the imaginary as the real, it also undermines any contrast to the real, absorbing the real within itself'.³⁸ This forms the background to why *Sylvania Waters* could so unproblematically be referred to as a real life soap; so unproblematically indeed that a new generic hybrid was invented to typify the programme in public discourse: the 'soapumentary'.

The 1974 British programme on the Wilkins family was presented as a straightforward documentary, that is, as an objective representation of reality. The conventional modern documentary had a unifying narrational perspective. Thus, in *The Family* Watson does the voice-over himself, thereby positioning himself as the omniscient narrator, in possession of the overall perspective. In *Sylvania Waters*, on the other hand, Watson has relegated the position of the narrator to Michael, Noeline's sixteen-year-old son who still lives with his mother and Laurie. In contrast to Watson's own voice-over in *The Family*, which tended to emphasize a generalizing overview, Michael's narration in *Sylvania Waters* is from an insider's perspective (he is, after all, part of the family), subjective and partial. Furthermore, as the youngest, teenage son, he is the least powerful, most marginal member of the family. That it is his point of view which is privileged in *Sylvania Waters*, suggests a loss of perspective, a loss of certainty which characterized *The Family* as an authoritative documentary. This is further reinforced by the self-conscious use of soap's narrational conventions in Michael's voice-over. Speaking about his Mum and Laurie, he expressed the final cliffhanger at the end of the penultimate episode: 'Will they get married? Will they go to Europe? Tune in to the next episode and find out'. No wonder that *Sylvania Waters* could be described as 'more soap than soap itself', as a Sydney weekly called it.³⁹ 'These are real people, being given the soap-opera treatment'.⁴⁰ Such comments suggest an inability to determine the generic status of the programme. In the midst of the *Sylvania*

41 In Couchman on soaps.

Waters row, talk show host Peter Couchman put together a programme on Australian soaps. His two most important guests were Paul and Dione: 'I think people have got very confused about you now, Paul and Dione, haven't they. Because they are not quite sure whether *Sylvania Waters* is a soap, or whether it is real life, or whether you are actors or what.'⁴¹ This general feeling of uncertainty tends to undercut the representational authority of the programme. Is it about a real family at all? And is it about a family in the first place?

Such uncertainty is an inevitable effect of the changed position of television in relation to the now exploded and spectacularized family. What *Sylvania Waters* shows is that television can no longer serve as site for the construction of a consensual and homogeneous imagined community based on the nuclear family. The close scrutiny of the exploded Baker–Donaher family paradoxically reinforces only the recognition that the normative nuclear family, as represented in sociology and advertising, was fiction rather than fact. As a result, the specularity of the Baker–Donahers is undermined by their spectacularity. They now circulate in the nonreferential world of simulation.

When the Wilkins family appeared on television as *The Family*, the pressure on the marriage split up the couple and the family. The Louds split up during the filming of them. In both cases, the resulting explosion of the family was real, and in both cases the splits were said to be associated with the new public visibility of the families. Twenty years on, the day-to-day effects of televisual spectacularization are better understood. The Baker–Donahers have agents – signalling their status, acquired through television, as marketable celebrities. Brian Walsh, Noeline and Laurie's agent, remarked shortly after the series finished that: 'The interest since the show has been phenomenal. I mean I handled Kylie [Minogue] and Jason [Donovan] when *Neighbours* took off and it has nothing on *Sylvania Waters*.'⁴²

42 Quoted in Jane Fraser, 'Noeline's tale of troubled waters'.

Paul and Dione have become celebrities in their own right, appearing not only on Couchman's show but on talk-back radio and other programmes. Walsh's reference point for Noeline's popularity is two actors from *Neighbours*. The celebrity occupies an indeterminate position: neither real nor imaginary but hyperreal, it is a position constructed in and through the circulation of media images.

Noeline was said to have been inconsolable about the way she was made into an object of hatred and ridicule. The Donahers celebrated the showing of the last episode with the burning of the videotapes of the series in their garden. Watson was not impressed and evoked reminiscences of Nazi book burnings in the 1930s. He hinted at an intolerance which, he claimed, revealed a refusal to look at the truth. However, the whole event can also

be interpreted in a different way, as the *simulated performance* of family trauma. They had become stars, with a cheering public of 3,500 on their front lawn just after the last episode finished. Not surprisingly, the whole spectacle was itself televised in an episode of the reality television show *Hard Copy* on Channel Ten, one of Australia's commercial channels. Jane Fraser aptly described the event like this: 'Noeline had a spectacularly good cry . . . on *Hard Copy*, the Ten network program which filmed the family watching the family waving goodbye to the family. "It was a relief", explained Mr Walsh [the agent], "that it was all over".'⁴³ Yet precisely the newly acquired celebrity status of the Baker–Donahers ensures that it was not going to be over at all. If anything, this 'family' will continue its life in simulated form through continued media exposure.

It was Guy Debord who, not coincidentally also in 1971, described this new society as the society of the spectacle, characterized by a proliferation of the hyperreality of simulation.⁴⁴ The status of *Sylvania Waters* as a simulation, rather than (re)presentation, of 'an Australian family' unsettles the modern articulation of family, television and national imagined community. Where in modernity the system of representation, of which national broadcast television was a key part, judged us against a normative model – in this case the nuclear family – so as to homogenize us into a cohesive imagined community, today spectacular families circulate as images with no normative family reality against which they can be measured. This is what happened to the Baker–Donahers. Nevertheless, the ideology of the nuclear family continues to circulate as an ideal, which forms the background for the confused reception of *Sylvania Waters* in Australia. As the explosion of the nuclear family as a lived reality has become an inexorable fact, its image can no longer be a reference point for the imagined unity of the (Australian) nation. In the end, the *Sylvania Waters* affair has made it clear that television no longer has the capability, and authority, to represent the nation to itself.

We want to thank Stephen Crofts for allowing access to his forthcoming article, and for his comments on a late version of our article.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Guy Debord, *La société de spectacle* (Paris: Éditions Champs Libres, 1971); Eng. trans. *The Society of the Spectacle*, (Detroit: Black & Red, 1977).

Television sport as mas(s)culine cult of distraction

AVA ROSE and JAMES FRIEDMAN

One chides the Berliners for being *addicted to distraction*, but this is a petit-bourgeois reproach. . . . the tension to which the working masses are subjected . . . [is] an essentially formal tension which fills their day fully without making it fulfilling. Such a lack demands to be compensated, but this need can only be articulated in terms of the same surface sphere which imposed the lack in the first place. The form of entertainment necessarily corresponds to that of enterprise.

Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Cult of Distraction'.¹

¹ Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Cult of Distraction', (1926), reprinted in *New German Critique*, no. 40, (1987).

² Because our understanding of television sports as a 'masculine cult of distraction' is derived from our analysis of US commercial broadcasting and cultural practices, we will refer specifically to US television and its reception in making our argument. Our intention is not to suggest that this 'masculine cult of distraction' should be viewed as a 'national' cultural phenomenon, but rather to respect the textual and historical particularities of our objects (and subjects) of study. In fact, our theoretical argument would suggest that the operations which we have identified in US sports programming and reception can be extended to the texts and practices of television sports in other postindustrial cultures.

The pursuit of distraction observed by Kracauer in the 1920s has perhaps reached its hyperbolic expression in the consumption of sports on US commercial television.² If early film audiences sought escapist entertainment and superficial fulfilment in the picture palaces of Berlin, today's family of consumers has access to diversion in their own home. Perhaps the strongest – certainly the most consistent – lure to the screen is televised sport. Nowhere is there a more spectacular celebration of the surface sphere, a more explicit correspondence between enterprise and entertainment, or a more pervasive reiteration of dominant values.

In using Kracauer's theory of distraction as a paradigm for our analysis of television sport, we hope to suggest a relationship between masculine forms of mass entertainment and some of those 'tension[s]' to which the working masses are subjected'. Our

intention is to destabilize the theoretical feminization of mass consumption in general, and of distraction in particular. At the same time, we hope to avoid the kinds of 'petit-bourgeois reproach[es]' which have too often characterized critical theories of mass consumption. In other words, we hope to articulate a relationship between distracted spectatorship and ideology, while allowing for the diversity of actual 'readings'.

In 1926, Kracauer understood distraction as symptomatic of the tensions and inadequacies associated with modernity. Rather than dismissing the consumption of mass entertainment as a passive and reasonless addiction, Kracauer's essay appreciates distraction as a form of cultural consumption that 'makes sense' as a response to the tensions and unfulfilled needs created by a reasonless society. Although Kracauer's 'cult of distraction' is theoretically a non gender specific, mass cultural phenomenon, his description of mass spectatorship is intimately bound up with the image of the 'little shop girls who go to the movies'.³ This association of the feminine with mass consumption is not unique to Kracauer: several contemporary critics have noted the implicit (and sometimes explicit) feminization of modernity and mass culture in critical theory.⁴

Surprisingly, contemporary theories of film and television spectatorship have in many ways reiterated this gender distinction; aligning female reception with distraction, while assuming the male gaze to be voyeuristic, linear, and contemplative.⁵ In our view, formalist readings of certain 'feminine' modes of programming and reception have contributed to the characterization of distracted spectatorship as *implicitly feminine*, by drawing the correspondence between the rhythms of women's work in the home, and the 'flow' of daytime television.⁶

At the same time, feminist theories of 'spectatorship' have reinforced the view that mass cultural consumption is – like the soap opera spectator herself – essentially passive, manipulated, and lacking. Moreover, this 'distracted' consumption tends to be understood in relation – and opposition – to an insufficiently problematized 'classical' model of masculine spectatorship. While this classical mode of spectatorship may in fact be offered to male viewers by some televisual texts some of the time, it is our contention that a contemplative and voyeuristic spectatorship is not typical of the dominant position offered to the male viewer by US network television.

By looking at that quintessentially masculine genre, television sport, we will show how those texts which most explicitly address the male viewer (or, more precisely, address the viewer *as male*) interpellate the spectator simultaneously as 'masculine', and as

³ Siegfried Kracauer, 'Die Kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino', (1927), in *Das Ornament der Masse* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 279–94.

⁴ See for example: Andreas Huyssen, 'Mass culture as woman: modernism's other', in Tania Modleski (ed.), *Studies in Entertainment* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986); Tania Modleski, 'Femininity as mas(s)querade: a feminist approach to mass culture', in Colin McCabe (ed.), *High Theory, Low Culture* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1986); Patrice Petro, 'Modernity and mass culture in Weimar: contours of a discourse on sexuality in early theories of perception and representation', *New German Critique*, no. 40 (1987).

⁵ See for example: Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, (1975); Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁶ See especially Tania Modleski, 'The rhythms of reception', and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, 'The real soaps: TV commercials', in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Regarding Television* (Los Angeles: AFI, 1983).

distracted. We will suggest – against more conventional readings of televised sport as linear, goal-oriented, and fetishistic – that sports programmes are in fact open-ended, cyclical, and melodramatic; and are reflective (as well as constitutive) of a distracted experience of reception.

Despite commonly held assumptions that distraction is symptomatic of female spectators and daytime television, Rick Altman has pointed out that ‘an inseparable mixture of watching and non-watching’ must be understood as a ‘general style of viewing behaviour’ for commercial television spectators.⁷ Because television is generally consumed in the home – or in other environments which compete for the attention of its viewers – it must constantly address, enlist, and hold on to a potentially distracted spectator. It therefore makes sense to understand distraction as an organizing principle of television sport, which is more often consumed intermittently than contemplatively.

After all, women are not the only television spectators who are distracted by their viewing environments. Men are also interpellated by what Altman calls the ‘household flow’, and programming addressed to the male viewer must also compete with the demands of work and family: the lapses in attention; the social interactions; and, yes, even the domestic duties which occupy men’s supposed ‘leisure time’ (mowing the lawn, working on the car, fixing leaky faucets, and so on). Thus, rather than providing an ‘escape’ from the routines of everyday life, the mass consumption of television sport must be seen as an integral part of masculine work and play.

In order to attract and hold the viewers, television discourses interpellate spectators through direct address, a sense of immediacy and ‘liveness’, and the illusion that ‘those images seem to be made just for us’.⁸ Television sports programmes, in particular, position the viewer as part of a fluid and ongoing dialogue: inviting him to look, and look again; to interpret the image; to respond to the emotional content of the spectacle; and, in a literal sense, to participate in the metadiscourse of sport.

Thus, as television insinuates itself into the fabric of men’s everyday lives, the discursive address of sports programming invites the viewer not only to watch sport on television, but to be part of its universe. The television provides its viewers with access to a continuously evolving world, a community to which the sports fan can belong simply by tuning in. While this mode of readership is remarkably similar to the ‘complex exchange between viewer and text’⁹ which Robert Allen has identified in soap opera reception, the symbolic and actual community constructed by sports spectatorship in America is as masculine as the playing of the games themselves.

⁷ Rick Altman, ‘Television sound’, in Tania Modleski (ed.), *Studies in Entertainment*, p. 42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50. For a discussion of the function of ‘liveness’ in attracting and holding viewers, see Jane Feuer, ‘The concept of live television: ontology as ideology’, in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Regarding Television*.

⁹ Robert C. Allen, ‘On reading soaps: a semiotic primer’, in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Regarding Television*, p. 100.

There are many ways in which television sport constructs a uniquely masculine experience of spectatorship. On the one hand, it is similar to soap opera in its distracted reception, its construction of a gendered viewing community, and many of its discursive strategies and textual effects. At the same time, the skills upon which it depends, and the values which it reifies, are distinctly masculine.

In 'The rhythms of reception', Tania Modleski extends the theory of distraction to an analysis of daytime television reception, suggesting that the distracted and 'maternal' gaze of the soap opera viewer corresponds to the rhythms and demands of women's work in the home. According to Modleski, television soap opera rationalizes and reifies the conditions of patriarchal femininity by positioning the (female) spectator as

a sort of ideal mother, a person who possesses greater wisdom than all her children, whose sympathy is large enough to encompass the conflicting claims of her family (she identifies with them all)¹⁰

Thus, in their very structure, soaps habituate women to the 'interruption, distraction, and spasmodic toil' which is characteristic of housework.¹¹ At the same time, by focusing the female spectator's gaze on others, encouraging her to 'read' their needs, desires and intentions from facial expressions and body language, the soap opera reflects and reinforces the cultural imperative which requires women to do the 'emotional work' in their relationships.

By contract, one might expect a masculine mode of spectatorship to avoid the emotional register, emphasizing instead the classical masculine pleasure in voyeurism and objectification, and constructing a more linear, goal-oriented structure of looking. In fact, this is precisely the way in which Margaret Morse interprets sports spectatorship. In her essay 'Television sports: replay and display', Morse argues that television sports spectatorship involves a 'gaze at maleness' which depends upon – while masking – a fetishistic pleasure in objectifying the male body.¹²

While we would not deny the homoerotic pleasures in sports participation and spectatorship, we would like to suggest that the sports fan's visual pleasure is not primarily based on a classical model of masculine desire. The sports gaze depends not on distance, fragmentation, or objectification, but on identification, nearness, and participation. The male viewer's relationship to the image is in fact quite similar to that of the female soap viewer: he is alternately absorbed in multiple identifications, and distracted. Rather than emphasizing a voyeuristic and objectifying gaze, television sport seems to invite the viewer to engage in a

¹⁰ Modleski, 'The rhythms of reception', p. 92. Modleski's use of the phrase 'all her children' is a play on the name of a very popular daytime soap opera, *All My Children*, (ABC).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹² Margaret Morse, 'Television sports: replay and display', in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Regarding Television*, p. 45.

distracted, identificatory, and dialogic spectatorship which may be understood as a masculine counterpart to soap opera's 'maternal gaze'. The sports fan is like the brother on the sidelines: he shares the greater wisdom and perspective of the commentators, whilst identifying alternately with players, coaches, and fans.

The sports spectator is thus engaged in a process of 'reading others' which stresses the intuitive over the analytical, and privileges the reactions of others over the action itself. This is less a 'scientific inquiry' (as Morse suggests) than a psychological one. The hermeneutic process of reading and evaluating athletic performances certainly requires a degree of fetishization of the male body, which, as Morse argues, the 'scientific' discourse of statistics may serve to disavow. However, this analytical discourse is ultimately qualified by the *melodramatic*: the human angle, the personal drama, and the insistence on 'mind over matter' which inform each assessment of the physical play of the game.

Further, this attention to subjective factors over objective actions should not be conceived as a deviation from masculine modes of attention. In fact, the skills which this hermeneutic process cultivates are as fundamental to male work as interruptability and other-orientation are to women's domestic labour. What is ultimately at stake in our argument, then, is a reconceptualization of masculine modes of consumption and production: we are suggesting that the distracted, decentred, and other-oriented consumption of sport by television spectators reflects and reifies the patterns of perception and the skills required of the postindustrial male worker.

While classical masculine spectatorship corresponds to the goal-oriented and linear production of industry, and reflects the industrial worker's attention to a single task, men's work in our consumer society depends on different skills and a different mode of attention. In fact, postindustrial labour may – like housework – actually require distraction. In the service sector, management, and sales-oriented occupations, men and women alike are expected to concentrate on several tasks at once, to be constantly interruptable, and to focus on the needs of others.

The discourse of the television sports commentators provides a model of sports consumption which reinforces the mode of attention demanded by postindustrial work. As with most television programming, the soundtrack of any televised sports event is addressed simultaneously to the attentive spectator and the distracted fan. In television sport, the commentators in particular mediate between the flow of sports programming and the distractions of the viewing situation. The direct address of the commentators is thus central to the discursive organization of the

sports narrative, and to the placement of spectators in relation to the sports metatext, and to each other.

Because the dimensions of the sports narrative preclude the possibility of its mastery by any one subject, the collective discourse of the commentators provides coherence and a site for the production of meaning. As in soaps, television sports programming must constantly supply background information so that the spectator can make sense of the action, and engage in the process of interpretation and speculation which characterizes television sports spectatorship.

This is precisely the role of the 'colour man', who reminds the viewer of statistics, past achievements and world records; and places current events in historical perspective. The commentary of the 'colour man' functions like the gossip of soap operas, providing the fan with all the 'inside information' that impacts on the events which are unfolding on the screen. Significantly, this 'insider' discourse is frequently accompanied by closeups of the players and coaches, replays of spectacular moments, and reaction shots – in other words, the melodrama of sports.

While the 'colour man' puts the game in its emotional and historical perspective, the 'play-by-play' commentator narrates the action in the present. His job is to give a discursive soundtrack to the visual representation of sports, enabling the distracted viewer to keep up with the game, and calling him back to the screen for the highlights. His is the discourse of 'liveness', and it is the play-by-play commentator who lends a sense of immediacy and virtual reality to the representation of sport on television.

In sport, both the analysis of the game, and the synthesis of past and present, always point toward the future. The teleological momentum of the game – and of each sport – is reinforced by the commentators' discourse of anticipation and speculation. However, this apparently linear trajectory does not lead to resolution or closure in the classical sense. Like daytime soaps – but unlike the majority of prime-time and weekend programming – television sport is serial: it is ongoing, continuous, and always to-be-continued.

As with any serial, the consumption of television sports cannot be defined by the viewing of a single programme.¹³ Each game is perceived in relation to the entire season, the history of each sport, and the yearly cycle of sports representation on television. In this way, the outcome of a game is never the end: there is always a next game, the next season, and the next star player . . . not to mention the next sport. The commentators are the discursive glue which binds these metatexts together, and facilitates their consumption by spectators whose access to the narratives of sport is always partial and interrupted.

Perhaps the most important discursive function of the sports

13 As Raymond Williams first pointed out, no television programme can be understood as a discrete text: each show is embedded in the 'flow' of television (commercials, station breaks, other programmes, other channels, etc.). See Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Shocken, 1974). However, the narrative closure of many prime-time programmes (television movies, documentaries, dramatic series, sitcoms, and so on) does mark these texts as 'discrete' in a way that serial programmes never are.

commentators is to address the male spectator as 'one of the guys', establishing a collective male identity through television sport. This is achieved through the form as well as the content of the commentators' discourse. In providing knowledge, gossip, and narrative information, the commentators give the viewer the tools he needs to perform a dominant reading of the sports text. These 'tools' enable the sports fan to engage in a range of discourses and practices that connote 'maleness' in our culture.

The commentators together comprise the model spectator. In their discursive exchange, they embody the utopian ideals of sports reception and participation. In fact, they present sports reception *as* participation, as a dialogue between at least three men: the 'play-by-play' commentator, the 'colour man', and the viewer at home. This dialogue – with its mixture of information, anecdote, and anticipation – engages the sports fan in the participatory reception characteristic of sports viewing: inviting him to call the plays, argue with the referees, and coach 'his' players from the simulated sidelines.

The boundary of the television screen apparently dissolves as the symbolic exchange of sports becomes actual, and the spectator is literally absorbed in the virtual reality of television sports.¹⁴ This breakdown of boundaries is remarkably similar to Tania Modleski's description of daytime soap opera reception:

Soap operas tend more than any other form, to break down the distance required for the proper working of identification. But rather than seeing these cases as pathological instances of *over-identification*. . . . I would argue that they point to a different *kind* of relationship between spectator and characters. . . . The viewer does not *become* the characters. . . but rather relates to them as intimates, as extensions of her world.¹⁵

While Modleski is offering a positive alternative to theorizations of female 'over-identification', the 'different kind' of spectatorship which she describes is still understood as implicitly feminine: characteristic of daytime television, female viewers, and an essentially feminine (if not female) desire for 'nearness'. At the same time, Modleski assumes that the 'proper working of identification' requires distance, which is presumably an essential component of masculine (if not biologically male) spectatorial pleasure.

However, the male fan who participates in the dialogic activity of television sports reception is not the solitary, voyeuristic spectator of classical film theory. Alternately absorbed in multiple identifications and distracted, the television sports spectator has much more in common with the daytime soap opera viewer. While in his fantasies the fan may 'become' the hero of sports,

14 Margaret Morse, 'An ontology of everyday distraction: the freeway, the mall, and television', in Patricia Mellencamp (ed.), *The Logics of Television* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

15 Modleski, 'The rhythms of reception', pp. 68–9.

the text does not interpellate him in this kind of classical identification. Instead – like the female soap fan – he relates to the ‘characters’ of sports as intimates, as ‘extensions of his world’. At the same time, he experiences each programme, not as a discrete text, but as an open, continuous, and never-ending story, which penetrates – at the same time as it takes him away from – his own reality.

As he experiences that ‘partial loss of touch with the here and now’ that Margaret Morse associates with distraction,¹⁶ the sports fan tests his own evaluative skills in the otherworld of sports. In this world of entertainment which is the shadow of enterprise, the working man can question authority and vent frustration, at the same time as he engages in those very discourses which facilitate his own incorporation. In his leisure time, then, the sports fan is sharpening the skills he will need to succeed in the world of work: judgement, evaluation, speculation, teamwork, competitiveness. Meanwhile, television sport offers that ‘attenuated fiction-effect’ of distraction which, to paraphrase Kracauer, ‘fills our days fully without making them fulfilling’.¹⁷

In his writings of the 1920s, Kracauer draws the correspondence between the forms of mass entertainment and alienated labour in order to show how mass culture reflects and rationalizes the tensions created by a capitalist system. Recent theorists of popular culture have similarly pointed to the exposure of conflict and ideological contradictions in such forms as the musical, film noir and, especially, melodrama.

In her essay ‘Notes on Sirk and melodrama’, Laura Mulvey argues that women’s melodrama functions ‘as a safety valve for ideological contradictions centred on sex and the family’.¹⁸ We would like to suggest that television sport may similarly be read as the representation of moral and ideological conflicts around *masculine* identity and social roles. At the same time, sports programming on television is a vehicle for the utopian imaging – and reification – of corporate and patriarchal ideals of the masculine.

Like melodrama, sports narratives highlight personal struggle, social tension, and moral conflict. The extremes of emotion are exaggerated, and opposing forces are pitted against each other in absolute dualisms. Everything in sports representation reiterates this ‘moral manichaeism’: from the clashing of team helmets generated by the opening computer graphics, and the visual contrasts between the teams’ colours and opposing movements, to the endless juxtapositions of closeups highlighting the personal inner struggles of coaches and players from the two sides.¹⁹ Even the referees are visually coded as the arbiters of this conflict:

¹⁶ Morse, ‘An ontology of everyday distraction’, p. 193.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 193.

¹⁸ Mulvey, ‘Notes on Sirk and melodrama’, *Movie*, no. 25, (1977–8).

¹⁹ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976).

wearing the black and white stripes which symbolize their 'objective' position as mediators between opposing forces.

On the one hand, television sport embraces the ideals of democracy: equal opportunity, fairness, and a balance between individual achievement and the collective good. However, as in US society at large, these ideals are frequently in conflict with the values of capitalism, generating a tension between workers and owners, ethics and efficacy, teamwork and social Darwinism. The games themselves simultaneously encourage collective effort and reward competitiveness, and the rhetoric of sports paradoxically praises individual feats of heroism while demanding self-sacrifice.

The conflicting values of sport manifest themselves in a tension that is visible both on and off the playing field. The irreconcilable ideals of masculinity come to a head-on collision on these organized battle grounds, where macho aggression is both required and punished. The star athlete must be tough, determined, and unstoppable – until the whistle blows. He must be monomaniacally focused on his goal, indifferent to opposition, and yet respectful of the rules of the game. Television sports coverage glorifies the supreme capitalist ethic of survival of the fittest, and yet unruly athletes are condemned when they exercise their power outside the bounds of the game.

Sport in the USA embodies all the illusions of opportunity and upward mobility that the nation holds dear. At the same time, the economic and political realities of sport give the lie to the myths of democracy, equal opportunity, and integration. For example, many popular critics have argued that the image of the sports superstar functions as a kind of lure for disenfranchised youth: a magical fantasy of escape which is unrealistic for all but a handful of athletes. In this way, the utopian universe of sport may serve to distract its fans from the harsh realities of economic and racial inequality with a mythic fantasy of integration which ultimately reiterates conservative US values.

While this is structurally a question of class, it is manifestly an issue of race, for an overwhelming percentage of professional athletes in the USA are black. The extraordinary visibility of blacks in sport embodies the ideals of equal opportunity and integration which characterize official discourses about race. However, this visibility cuts both ways: on the one hand, the success of black athletes is real, and the prevalence of black sports stars on television provides spectators from all racial and ethnic groups with 'positive images' of black men.²⁰ On the other hand, the image of upward mobility and personal achievement which these black stars present is contained within traditional discourses which champion individual excellence rather than collective empowerment.

²⁰ For a discussion of the problematic of 'positive images' see Robert Stam and Louise Spence, 'Colonialism, racism and representation: an introduction', *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1983). Examples of 'positive/negative' image analyses of blacks in Hollywood are: Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks* (New York: Bantam, 1974) and Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black* (New York: OUP, 1977). For theoretical discussions of racial stereotyping, see Homi Bhabha, 'The other question: the stereotype and colonial discourse', *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 6 (1983), pp. 18–36; and Steve Neale, 'The same old story: stereotypes and differences', *Screen Education*, vol. 32/33, (1979–80), pp. 33–8.

²¹ Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and utopia', *Movie*, no. 24, (1977), reprinted in Rick Altman (ed.), *Genre: the Musical* (London: RKP, 1981).

Moreover, the realities of discrimination, exploitation, and unequal opportunity cannot be completely resolved by the utopian discourses of sport on television. If blacks are over-represented as athletes, they are still grossly under-represented as coaches, managers, owners, officials, and even quarterbacks. This imbalance is consistent with the historical exploitation of blacks in certain entertainment industries (especially music), where people of colour have been accepted as performers, while positions of management and power have been reserved for whites. Against this (actual) racial inequality, the high visibility of (a limited number of) blacks in these industries is invoked as (symbolic) proof that equal opportunity does in fact exist.

Thus, the utopian discourses of television sport seem to work in the way that Richard Dyer describes in his discussion of the musical: by evoking a utopian sensibility that reflects and responds to real social needs and ideological contradictions.²¹ In sport, tensions between black and white, the individual and the collective, the 'in group' and the 'other', the personal and the corporate, desire and the law, are played out – not only on the playing fields but within the discourses of the representations themselves.

In this way, social tensions and ideological oppositions are displaced onto – and contained by – the dramatic conflicts between teams and between players. The televisual representation of athletic competition both embodies and rationalizes a complex and value-laden oppositional structure. Sport on US television embraces a range of dualisms, from the game-specific conflicts between teams, individual players, coaches, and owners, to the broader antagonisms between the fans, who identify themselves with a given side in the conflict.

This brings into play a discourse of civic and national pride, loyalty and, of course, competition. The discourse engendered between fans of opposing teams is always one of rivalry. The stakes range from one's pride in a home team, or faith in a personal favourite, to the more 'rational' powers of assessment with which one picks a winner. The excessive over-identification which is an integral part of sports spectatorship, and the blurring of boundaries – in which the sports fan's sense of self-worth is bound up with the performance of 'his' team – work to draw the sports fan into the conflicts of sport. He is interpellated by a discourse of 'us and them', which has implications for the cultivation of nationalism and ethnocentrism, as well as all those discourses which depend on binary thinking: racism, sexism, homophobia.

While the 'little shop girls' who go to the movies and the housewives who watch daytime television have been the subject of Critical Theory's scrutiny of the 'cult of distraction', a closer look at masculine forms of mass cultural consumption reveals that distraction is not a uniquely feminine mode of consumption or production. Distraction seems in fact to be equally, if somewhat differently, endemic to masculine and feminine forms of entertainment and enterprise in our postindustrial culture.

While there is still a significant disparity between men's and women's economic, political and cultural power, the *skills* required of both men and women in the workplace – and in both the public and private spheres – appear to be growing increasingly similar. Along with the shift from an industrial to a service economy, and the heightened economic and social imperatives of conspicuous consumption, there seems to be a destabilization of the historical association of masculinity with active production, and femininity with passive consumption. As women move into (and out of) more active subject positions and social roles, and men are increasingly appealed to by advertising and the culture industry, the realities of production and consumption for both sexes no longer fit into neat categories of activity and passivity.

At the same time, both men and women may look increasingly to mass culture not only for distraction, but for the exposure of contradictions, the utopian resolution of conflict, and the collective affirmation of identity that mass entertainment offers. Television sport may perform for male viewers a similar function to that effected by women's daytime television: exposing the ideological contradictions of masculine identity in a capitalist, racist, and patriarchal society. However, the dominant position offered to the male viewer by US television sport appears to be more conservative of the status quo than that offered to women by soaps.

In his early writings on distraction, Kracauer distinguished between a reasonless and rationalized distraction, which leads away from – or masks – truth, and a distraction which offers the possibility of redemption. He argued that distraction leads away from truth when it is 'an end in itself', when contradictions are

forced back into a unity that no longer exists, [and when,] rather than acknowledging the state of disintegration which such shows ought to represent, they glue the pieces back together after the fact and present them as organic creations.²²

Thus, for Kracauer, distraction has a redemptive function only if it exposes itself – and therefore society – in its true disorder. When, on the other hand, mass culture seeks to resolve

²² Kracauer, *Das Ornament des Masse*, pp. 94–5.

contradiction, to mask tensions and present a false order, it offers nothing more than diversion and reification.

While television sport does expose social tensions and ideological contradictions around race, class, and masculine identity, it does *not* 'acknowledge disintegration', nor does it expose itself – or society – as disordered. On the contrary, the rhetoric of sport reiterates an ethic of integration and incorporation: insisting that individuals put aside differences, put the team first, and play by the rules. In this way, sports discourse seems ultimately to reify the dominant values of corporate USA. This should not be surprising, since the average US sports spectator (more often white, most often straight, and almost always male) has an investment in the corporate Social Darwinism of sports. He has a lot to lose by exposing the contradictions of mainstream ideology, and even if the system has not served him well, he feels entitled to the American Dream that sport promises him.

While many of the women who watch soaps may also cling to dominant values, the exposure of ideological tension which is an inevitable part of melodrama is in fact more likely to affirm rather than threaten the female spectator's sense of entitlement. On the other hand, those mass cultural forms which reiterate hegemonic structures may be more likely to affirm masculine privilege. It is ironic, then, that female spectators have been associated with the passive and uncritical consumption of mass culture. The promises offered by these reified forms are certainly *no less* appealing to the male spectator. Indeed, as Andreas Huyssen points out,

The claim that the threats (or, for that matter, the benefits) of mass culture are somehow 'feminine' has finally lost its persuasive power. If anything, a kind of reverse statement would make more sense: certain forms of mass culture, with their obsession with gendered violence, are more of a threat to women than to men. After all, it has always been men rather than women who have had real control over the productions of mass culture.²³

²³ Andreas Huyssen, 'Mass culture as woman: modernism's other', in Tania Modleski (ed.), *Studies in Entertainment*, p. 205.

The masculine universe constructed by television sport seems to work to reinforce this patriarchal structure. Distracted and decentred, exposed to social tensions and systemic inadequacies, the sports spectator is nevertheless firmly anchored in the discourses of production and consumption which define him as threatening, rather than threatened.

While any text can be read against the grain, the distraction which the sports text offers the mainstream viewer both embodies and utopically resolves the contradictions of masculinity in our culture. However, a spectator who does not fully identify with

24 Steve Neale, 'Propaganda',
Screen, vol. 18, no. 3 (1977),
 p. 34.

25 Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/decoding',
 in *Culture, Media, Language*
 (London: Hutchinson, 1980),
 p. 131.

this position may engage in a very different reading, and may not, in fact, see the text as resolving all contradictions. As Steve Neale has argued, '“address” is not simply synonymous with textual address'.²⁴ While the latter 'can be analyzed and has an effectivity', the *ideological effect* of a text must be understood in relation to the conjuncture of all of all those discourses and practices which inform its production and consumptions. Thus, while the discursive address of film and television texts constructs preferred positions for the spectator, each viewer is always simultaneously interpellated by a number of discourses (cultural, institutional, personal) which define him as a subject, and impact on his reading of any text.

Stuart Hall has articulated this non-equivalence of textual address and actual readers as a 'lack of fit' between the codes which inform the encoding and decoding of a given text.²⁵ Referring only to news (or informational) programming, Hall suggests three broad categories for decoding in which the dominant position is either taken up, opposed, or 'negotiated'. While this may be rather schematic, even for explicitly 'ideological' television texts such as the news, we suggest that the 'taking up' of a preferred reading position is even more complex in relation to ostensibly non-ideological (entertainment) programming such as television sport.

For example, the very pleasures involved in sports spectatorship may involve some degree of 'taking up' the dominant position offered by sports text: identifying with normative masculine points of view; celebrating the utopian fantasies of integration and incorporation; and engaging in a discursive practice which rationalizes ideological contradictions and disintegration with artificial oppositional structures. However, it would be simplistic to assume that any spectator who derives pleasure from television sports spectatorship is unproblematically taking up the hegemonic values of television sport. Nor would we want to suggest that pleasure is somehow antithetical to critical reception.

Indeed, the formal lack of resolution in television sport, as well as its discursive insistence on dialogic spectatorship, may in fact encourage a degree of reading against the grain. If the television sports fan is indeed continually moving in and out of multiple identifications, constantly negotiating the interpenetration of text and reality, and actively engaged in rereading the image and second-guessing the narrative, he may in fact be more disposed to perceive a 'lack of fit' between representation and (his view of) reality. After all, no matter how much the utopian discourse of sport works to resolve tensions, there are always conflicts in the universe of sport which cannot be neatly contained by the rules and representations of the game.

26 See: David Morley, *The 'Nationwide' Audience: Structure and Decoding*, BFI Television Monographs, no. 11, (London: BFI, 1980); and Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth, '“Don't treat us like we're so stupid and naive”: towards an ethnography of soap opera viewers', in Ellen Seiter, et al (eds.) *Remote Control: Television, Audiences & Cultural Power*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1989).

A study of the actual responses of US television sports audiences might explore the extent to which viewers perceive sport as exposing and/or resolving ideological contradictions. 'Ethnographic' studies of television viewers such as David Morley's *The Nationwide Audience*, and the work on American soap opera reception by Ellen Seiter, et al ('Don't treat us like we're so stupid and naive') have demonstrated the limitations of extrapolating theories of the 'mass spectator' solely from textual analyses.²⁷ The study of soap audiences in particular illustrates the dangers in assuming a congruence between the *ideal feminine spectator* constructed by soap operas, and the *actual readings* performed by female viewers.

These readings suggest, for example, that Tania Modleski may have exaggerated the extent to which soap viewers identify with 'all their children'. Similarly, to insist that the visual pleasures in television sports spectatorship consist predominantly in classical objective, omnipotence, objectification, and closure, would be to confuse the *textual possibilities* of voyeurism, fetishism, and 'objectivity', with the *actualities* of sports reception. While our analysis of the discursive address of television sports suggests that the sports fan is in fact offered multiple points of identification, encouraged to relate to the 'characters' of sports as 'extensions of his world', and invited to transgress the classical boundaries between subject and text, we hesitate to draw absolute conclusions about sports reception from an analysis of the programming alone.

It is time to subject masculine mass cultural consumption to the same kinds of critical analysis with which feminists have scrutinized soap operas. We believe a closer look at the texts which are addressed to males – as well as at the 'masculine cult of distraction' which characterizes the consumption of these texts – would expose some of the tensions and contradictions inherent in patriarchal masculinity. By problematizing the mass production of *masculinity*, we believe such a project would help to destabilize the theoretical alignment of *femininity* with passive, distracted, and 'uncritical' consumption.

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1922 and South African television

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Introduction

In March 1984 SABC-TV (South African Broadcasting Corporation) broadcast an eight-part historical drama, *1922*, based on the 1922 strike by white miners. This episode in South African history has been variously described as 'The Rand Revolt',¹ the 'Red Revolt', and a 'Nationalist Revolt',² signalling the different ways in which the event is signified by historians. What makes it a particularly significant moment in South African labour history is that it is evidence of the class struggle of white labour, organized by Communist Party militants, against mining capital, and a revolt of Afrikaner workers against the hegemony of English economic and cultural domination. Thus, while Afrikaners identified economically with other immigrant workers, they used the conflict to promote their nascent ethnic/national claims. This resulted in the now notorious banner carried by the Fordsburg miners: 'Workers of the World, Fight and Unite for a White South Africa'. The event thus signalled a moment rich in ideological contestation, and it is arguable that on this very basis it was quite a radical departure from normal SABC fare which works for ideological closure.

This paper will show that the ideological project underlying the establishment of SABC-TV was to limit the boundaries of political debate to those set by the ideology of the ruling Afrikaner National Party. Thus to air a programme such as *1922* was to raise issues – about labour action, the legitimacy of the Communist Party, the conflict between 'Boer and Brit' – on which the State and SABC had apparently achieved consensus.³

¹ HJ Simons and RE Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850–1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin African Library, 1969); Norman Herd, *1922: the Revolt on the Rand* (Johannesburg: Blue Crane Books, 1966); TRH Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (Oxford: OUP, 1977).

² Herd, *1922*, p. 21.

³ The South African Communist Party was outlawed by the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act. It was unbanned in 1991.

1922: members of the South African police force who, together with the army, helped crush the Rand revolt.



This contradiction is further highlighted by the very timing of the broadcast during the first State of Emergency, which in effect marked the failure of the state's ideological project and its recourse to domination by force.

In this paper we will use *1922* to probe the nature of television in South Africa. We have chosen this particular production because it highlights some of the contradictory ways in which South African television addresses its audience. We will argue that while the individual text is a seemingly radical departure for SABC-TV, it should rather be seen as embodying the institution's contradictions. We will show that SABC-TV has a history of ideological conservatism, but that it adopted a Reithian public service ethos rooted in Liberalism.⁴ Furthermore, despite being established as a public service institution, approximately 70 per cent of SABC-TV's funding is from commercial advertising. This financial imperative has resulted in the scheduling importance of drama (30 per cent of scheduling time), and in particular, of cheaper foreign imports. Because of SABC-TV's reliance on foreign drama, its ideological control is at its weakest in this general category. This, we suggest, has opened up a space for local dramatists to probe the hegemonic ideology by focusing on episodes and characters in South African history. It is this context, we argue, that enables us to understand the circulation of the seemingly radical and provocative discourses of *1922*. However, as our analysis of the programme will show, *1922* still works within the bounds of the dominant televisual representations of South African history, which tend to focus on

⁴ R Tomaselli, 'Public service broadcasting in the age of information capitalism' in *Communicare*, vol 8, no. 2 (1989)

5 Other South African examples of the genre include *The Fourth Reich* (1992), *1922* (1991, 1984), *Barney Barnato* (1990), *Heroes* (1986), *Richard Gush of Salem* (1984), and *Settlers* (1980, 1982).

6 Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television, (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1971) para. 144, p. 17.

7 *Time*, 20 November 1964; Peter Orlik, 'South Africa: how long without TU?', *Journal of Broadcasting*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1970); Orlik, 'Southern Africa' in Sydney W Head (ed.), *Broadcasting in Africa* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974); Edward C Corrigan, 'South Africa enters the electronic age: the decision to introduce television', *Africa Today*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1974); R Harrison and P Eckman, 'TV's last frontier: South Africa', *Journal of Communication* (Spring 1976); WA Hachten and CA Giffard, *Total Onslaught: the South African Press under Attack* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1984).

8 Hachten and Giffard, *Total Onslaught*, p. 206.

9 Hachten and Giffard summarize the Broederbond's aims as follows: 'First, to maintain a separate pure-white Afrikaans (nation), ... second, establishment of Afrikaner domination and rule in South Africa; third, as part of that process, the subtle but definite afrikanerization of English-speaking South Africans; and finally, the maintenance of a white South African nation built on the rock of the Afrikaner volk with the Broederbond as the hard core of that rock.' *Ibid.*, p. 204. The importance of the SABC to the Broederbond/Nationalist party alliance, note Hachten and Giffard, is evidenced by two Broederbond documents: 'The first, "Masterplan for a White Country: The Strategy", explained the importance of having Broeders in charge of the Bantu service', and the second,

the conflict between 'Boer and Brit,' marginalizing the primary conflict between the native peoples of South Africa and foreign colonizers.⁵

The logic of South African TV: Nationalist Party broadcaster and public service ethos

In a world rapidly approaching a stage where direct reception of television transmissions from overseas sources via satellites will become a reality, South Africa must have its own television service in order to nurture and strengthen its own spiritual roots, to foster respect and love for its own spiritual heritage and to respect and project the South African way of life, as it has developed here in its historical context.⁶

This statement from the Meyer Commission of Enquiry into 'matters relating to television' gives a sense of the way in which television was seen by representatives of the State. Only when the aims and recommendations of the Meyer Commission were deemed realizable was television first broadcast in South Africa on 5 January 1976. A persistent thread running through the debates by government officials about whether or not television should be introduced is their concern about the possible (negative) political effects of television.⁷ Having come to power in 1948, the Nationalist Party sought to maintain this power through its ideological control of education and broadcasting. The Broadcast Act of 1936 established the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) as a government monopoly, but it was only after the Nationalist Party victory in the 1948 elections that the SABC was transformed from an essentially English service to one in which Afrikaner Nationalist interests were paramount.⁸ Control over the SABC was established by appointing Afrikaners and Broederbond (the secret Afrikaner rightwing 'brotherhood') members to the board of governors, and by placing a greater emphasis on Afrikaans programming.⁹

Nationalist Party/Broederbond intervention in the debate culminated in the establishment of a twelve-man commission of enquiry into 'matters relating to television' under the chairmanship of Dr Piet Meyer in December 1969. The commission delivered its report in March 1971, and in April the Minister of National Education reported that the government had agreed to introduce television within the next five years.¹⁰ Given that seven of the twelve-man commission were Broederbond members and that its chairman, SABC chairman Piet Meyer had been chairman of the organization from 1960 until 1972,¹¹ it is not surprising that the Report's recommendations were a recipe for the way in which television broadcasting could disseminate

dated 1970, dealt with the proposed introduction of television. Ibid., p. 205.

10 Peter Orlik, 'Southern Africa'.

11 Hachten and Giffard, *Total Onslaught*, p. 205.

12 Meyer Commission Report, para. 130, p. 15.

13 Ibid., para. 139, p. 16.

14 Harrison and Eckman, 'TV's Last Frontier'.

15 R Tomaselli, K Tomaselli and J Muller, *Currents of Power: State Broadcasting in South Africa* (Bellville, Cape: Anthropos Publishers, 1989), pp. 113 and 116-17.

16 See, for example, R Tomaselli et al, *Currents of Power*.

17 Ibid., pp. 109ff.

18 Cundhill interview with K Tomaselli, *SAFTA Journal*, vol. 5 (1985), p. 11.

and support the government's apartheid policies. The Meyer Commission thus recommended:

A television service for South Africa . . . should be founded on such principles as will ensure that the Christian system of values, the national identity and the social structure of its various commitments will be respected, preserved, and enriched . . .¹²

Furthermore, such a television system

. . . should guard strictly against the service degenerating into a medium propagating the 'provocative' behaviour of discontented and frustrated individuals as an example worthy of emulation by other like-minded persons. Moreover a good community service should never debase itself to become the mouthpiece of immature so-called 'reformers' who do not know what is at issue or what they want to achieve.¹³

This policy would be implemented through the SABC which was established as the national television broadcaster. Modelled on the BBC, SABC-TV would be a public service. Using the PAL colour system it would broadcast initially on one channel in both English and Afrikaans for approximately two-and-a-half hours in each language per evening. Local programmes would constitute 50 per cent of all programming.¹⁴

The decision to introduce television was thus conditioned by the way in which it could be used in the service of Nationalist Party/Broederbond ideology. The way in which this hegemonic position was achieved was through the 'selection and control of personnel and programmes', and through formal institutional gamekeeping mechanisms.¹⁵ The effect of these practices was most clearly evident in news, documentary, and magazine programmes. Consequently, it is the ideological critiques of these programmes which form the bases of most critical research on SABC-TV.¹⁶

While Afrikaner nationalist ideology was instituted in the manner described above, shaping what could and could not be broadcast, its hold was obviously not total. Most staffers interviewed by Tomaselli et al refer to the unspoken and unwritten ways in which 'they knew' what would and would not be allowed.¹⁷ For example, John Cundhill, scriptwriter of *1922* commented:

one is aware of the sensitivity of the situation when working for the SABC. But you never know; there is no clear line drawn on precisely how far one can go, or how far you cannot go. Nobody has ever spelt that out and nobody ever will. The only way to really find out where that line is, is to try something and see if you can get away with it.¹⁸

Even though the rationale for the introduction of television was functional – as part of the ruling National Party's ideological arsenal – its development was conditioned by political shifts within the country as well as the commercial demands of selling audiences to advertisers. Viewed from this perspective, one can discern two important developments in SABC-TV since its inception in 1976. First, an increase in advertising time from 5.75 per cent in 1978, when advertising was first introduced, to its current figure of 8 per cent. The 1990 Annual Report notes that 'SABC's position as a public broadcaster was unique in the world in that advertising revenue was the main source of income'; the 1991 ratio of advertising and sponsorship to license revenue being 68:29 (three from other sources). This led to its contradictory position of being a public service broadcaster, with an avowed commitment to maintaining several language and cultural services, and minority interest programmes, but being primarily commercially financed. A recurring concern in the Annual Reports is the need for SABC-TV to be financially viable.

A second, major development was the introduction of different channels to cater for different audiences: in December 1981, TV2 and TV3 were inaugurated on a single channel which aired twenty-seven hours weekly in five vernacular languages; in March 1985 TV4 started broadcasting in both English and Afrikaans on the TV2/3 channel which went off air at nine pm. TV4 was seen as complementary to TV1, which favoured programmes having a 'recognizably unique South African character'. In contrast to this, TV4 was the 'entertainment' channel, airing mostly foreign programmes. In January 1991 TV2/3/4 combined to form one multicultural channel, CCV-TV – 'Contemporary Community Values'.¹⁹ Each of these channel developments reflects not only ideological shifts in response to social changes within South Africa, but also the organization's need to balance its public service role with its commercial funding base. The fullest expression of this is given in its scheduling practices.

A key difference between South African and British or US scheduling has been its conception of the audience. SABC-TV scheduling was not only based on the ideological notion of the nuclear family, but also on two distinct 'racial' audiences: white and black. TV1 and TV4 were seen as 'white' channels, broadcasting in English and Afrikaans, whereas TV2 and TV3 were the 'black' channels, broadcasting in five vernacular languages. While the ideological conception of the two audiences is quite different, the programme flow seems to be similar.²⁰ Because SABC-TV has a dual language policy, TV1 alternates between being broadcast in English and Afrikaans. The morning

¹⁹ *This is the SABC*, an SABC Group Publication, Jan. 1992.

²⁰ Mornings are devoted to magazine and children's programmes; lunchtime to news and news magazine programmes; early afternoon children's programmes lead into soap operas between five and six pm. This is followed at six with a half hour news and magazine programme, leading into an hour-and-a-half of family entertainment: drama/comedy/game shows. The main evening news is at eight pm and is followed by a half hour news discussion programme which ends at nine pm. The rest of the evening is devoted to 'masculine' drama or films.

and afternoon programmes are generally a mix of English and Afrikaans, but the evenings alternate between the two languages, so that a parity between the two 'national' languages is maintained. (Thus from six to eight p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, programmes are broadcast in English, followed by Afrikaans programming from eight p.m. until close. The reverse happens on Tuesday, Thursdays, and Fridays.)

Roughly 50 per cent of programmes are locally made, with dramas being predominantly of foreign (mainly American and German) origin. In 1984, the year 1922 was first broadcast, drama accounted for approximately 26 per cent of television programming, 15 per cent of this being locally produced (Afrikaans drama 17.3 per cent; English drama 7.6 per cent). In 1991, drama accounted for approximately 34 per cent of television programming, but only 13 per cent of this was locally produced. An obvious reason for this is that cheaper foreign productions are more attractive than local productions to a financially strapped SABC.²¹ Because of the dependence on foreign drama it is this genre which creates the fissure in the 'ideological control' of SABC-TV programming. Also, because one of SABC-TV's aims is to promote local drama this has become the space in which local issues and culture can be explored. The way in which this space has been exploited depends largely on the initiative of local dramatists. Thus a writer like John Cundhill has tried to use his dramas to air topical issues and to push the limits of what was regarded as ideologically kosher by SABC-TV. Commenting on his sitcom, *O George*, he noted:

In our uniquely sensitive South African situation we were the first to cast Afrikaaner, English-speaking, Jewish and black South Africans in one situation. For the first time ever on our television we had blacks who were people with opinions and who had a significant role to play.²²

And commenting on the institutional response to an episode in another of his productions, *The Villagers*, which criticized the mining conditions of black miners, he remarked:

I don't know what the official response was, but again, that episode was broadcast because we didn't make any fuss and we never told anybody what we were planning. But the head of the English Drama Department did tell me afterwards to 'Cool it'. I don't know to what extent that reflected senior official thinking in the corporation. Somebody must have mentioned it to him, but from how high up I don't know.²³

Thus despite the institutional ideology of which everybody who worked for SABC-TV was aware, auteurs like Cundhill were able

²¹ The SABC has estimated that local productions cost an average of more than R1,500 a minute, as opposed to bought foreign material, which costs about R300 a minute. (*Weekly Mail*, 12–18 February 1993). Furthermore, when it comes to local drama productions, SABC pays the full production cost giving them ownership of the programme. With foreign productions they simply pay for the broadcast rights.

²² Cundhill interview, *SAFTA Journal*, p. 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

24 Ibid., p. 13.

to open ideological gaps within the space of television drama. Cundhill, described in the local press as 'SABC's top English Drama writer' (*Sunday Times*, 16 July 1989), was able to make programmes which focused on local issues and adopted a more liberal position than was typical of the institutional ideology.²⁴ This was possible for several reasons. First, because of the way in which drama was positioned vis-a-vis news and documentary programmes. It was these genres which were seen as the bearers of ideology (politics), and as such are seen as the institutional voice. Popular drama, on the other hand, is considered as 'entertainment', and is thus, almost by definition, apolitical. Furthermore, as a 'proven' auteur his work was subject to less scrutiny than 'unknown writers':

... there's no doubt about it, I operate at a particular advantage because of what I've already done. Because of my track record they're more inclined to say, 'If Cundhill's done it, it's probably OK'. If an unknown writer had presented the same script it would be looked at more carefully.²⁵

25 Other productions scripted by Cundhill include *Westgate* (1980), and *The Villagers* (1986).

Also, because Cundhill's works would be differentiated from other dramas as individually authored, this would mark them as his individual perspective, which the SABC as a public service institution could allow, without compromising its institutional ideology.

Cundhill was able to exploit the ideological fissures in the system because he understood the institutional structure of SABC-TV. In his words:

I've been very careful in saying anything about *The Outcast* because I'm sure if headlines appear saying 'Great Controversial Play Due to be Screened', then the SABC people upstairs are suddenly going to start getting twitchy and think, 'Crikey, what's this? We'd better find out more about it and have somebody preview it'. . . . The higher it goes I think the twitchier people get because there are all sorts of political ramifications that creep in. The fewer possibilities of veto, the better chances you have of pushing what you particularly want.²⁶

26 Cundhill interview, *SAFFTA Journal*, p. 13.

It was in this context, therefore, that *1922* was first broadcast on TV1 in March 1984 during the prime-time 'adult entertainment' slot of nine p.m. Scheduled at this time, it thus confirmed the programme's identity as 'entertainment'. But when it was rebroadcast in 1991, it was given a seven pm slot, which is arguably part of the early news/news magazine/family drama flow which leads into the evening news at eight pm. Positioned in this way, it potentially accrues to itself the meanings associated with 'soft news' programmes. According to Liza Haystack, Head of

27 Interview with authors, 11 February 1993.

28 Ibid.

29 *Financial Mail* Corporate Report on SABC, 29 November 1991.

30 Recent American examples include *FBI: True Stories*, *Top Cops*, *The Oliver North Story*, *Rescue 911*, *Unsolved Mysteries*. These programmes deal with 'law and order' issues, which are arguably a concern that is central to the US public. The focus of South African examples of the genre is somewhat different as they tend to deal with episodes in South African history. Recent examples include *The Fourth Reich* (1992), *1922* (1991, 1984), *Barney Barnato* (1990), *Heroes* (1986), *Richard Gush of Salem* (1984), and *Settlers* (1980, 1982).

31 TW Hoffer and RA Nelson, 'Docudrama on American television', *Journal of the University Film Association*, vol. 30, no. 2, (1978).

32 Seth Feldman, 'The electronic fable: aspects of the docudrama in Canada', *Canadian Drama*, vol. 9, no. 1, (1983), p. 40.

TV1 Scheduling, the reason for the rebroadcast was financial:

It was a period piece and thus hadn't dated. Also it was rebroadcast in December when viewership is down anyway. Furthermore, with locally produced programmes we own the rights. Because we pay for the production we own them outright.²⁷

In his view, the shift in scheduling time from nine to seven was not conditioned by the programme's identity, but rather by the institution's scheduling practices:

On Wednesday seven to eight pm we try to put on local drama for three of the four quarters. Same for Thursday evening Afrikaans slot.²⁸

Notwithstanding this pragmatism, given the political changes within the country, 1922 would have been far less threatening in 1991, and could therefore be more easily accommodated as 'family viewing' during the seven pm slot. Furthermore, in addition to the more open political climate of the 1990s, the SABC has shown a determination to distance itself from the government and to promote itself as a worthy broadcast institution for the proverbial 'new South Africa'.²⁹ This is reflected in their scheduling which is far more liberal than it was in the dark days of the 1980s. In this new context, 1922 becomes a sign of SABC's willingness to deal with controversial issues.

Genre and Meaning

Programmes based on the 'true story' have become an increasingly popular genre on South African television.³⁰ A distinctive feature of this genre is the place it occupies on the continuum between 'fact' (unmediated actuality, the 'true story' on which the programme is based) and its dramatic form. So, on the one hand it offers its audience the promise of historical knowledge, and on the other it offers them entertainment. It is this dual promise that has led theorists to investigate the genre.³¹ Given the popularity of the genre on South African television, what concerns us is the social function it serves, or the kinds of meanings it generates. One way of conceptualizing the genre, according to Seth Feldman, is as a folktale or fable. He writes:

We can think of the docudrama as a folklore or fable. Like the folktale, the docudrama is an exercise in social integration, a form which self-consciously encapsulates primary social or psychological lessons within the most widely accessible entertainment medium.³²

³³ John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (London: Methuen & Co., 1978).

³⁴ John Caughie, 'Progressive television and documentary drama', *Screen*, vol. 21, no. 3, (1980), p. 32.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁷ Feldman, 'The electronic fable', p. 40.

³⁸ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1973).

He arrives at this view by pointing to the similarity between Fiske and Hartley's notion of the bardic function of television³³ – in which the hegemonic views of the culture are circulated by television – and John Caughie's critique of docudrama: that it 'produces itself within a self-confirming integration and 'produces a spectator who is also confirmed in an already determined position'.³⁴ In this view, the docudrama/historical drama, like melodrama, is an essentially conservative genre which might raise questions about contemporary historical conditions, but which never challenges the social order it represents. Caughie argues that this spectator positioning is achieved by the docudrama's formal construction: the interplay between a 'documentary look' and 'dramatic look'³⁵ which addresses the spectator in the following way:

... the rhetoric of the drama inscribes the document within narrative and experience; the rhetoric of the documentary establishes the experience as an experience of the real and places it in a system of guarantees and confirmations.³⁶

In other words, Caughie argues, the spectator makes sense of the docudrama by the interplay between its formal codes (both documentary and fictional/dramatic), not by a knowledge of its referent. The documentary codes refigure the drama as being 'real', or 'true', or 'historical', establishing the reality or truthfulness of the diegetic world in which the drama is set. Once this has been achieved, the dramatic codes – conventional characterization, or the cause-effect flow of dramatic action – establish the drama within the viewer's experience of all other fictional narrative texts, which provide an understanding of the world in terms of individual experience. Extrapolating from Caughie's analysis, Feldman suggests that docudrama should not therefore be thought of in terms of its relation to the real, but should rather be conceptualized as the symbolic representation created by spectators in their negotiation of texts based on the two conflicting cinematic codes.³⁷

It is precisely through this synthesis of 'the real'/'not real' – the way in which the documentary and dramatic codes work on each other – that the genre attempts to secure its ideological function: as folktale or fable. Both of these terms suggest a mythic construct which in Barthes' terms is a culture's way of making sense of its history.³⁸ It is in this way – as a folktale – that we propose *1922* should be viewed.

Our argument is that we can account for the apparent contradictions in the broadcast of *1922* noted above if we see it as but one of the texts which SABC-TV, functioning as South Africa's 'bard', circulates within the dominant culture. As Fiske and Hartley write:

39 Fiske and Hartley, *Reading Television*, p. 89. Reprinted in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Television: The Critical View* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), p. 603.

the bardic mediator tends to articulate the negotiated central concerns of its culture, with only limited and often over-mediated references to the ideologies, beliefs, habits of thought and definitions of the situation which obtain in groups which are for one reason or another peripheral.³⁹

Understood in this context, we suggest the prime political or ideological function of the docudrama/true story on South African television is not so much to inform its audience about aspects of South African history (to tell a true story), but rather to give a particular meaning to 'South African history'. History is thus a discourse which, rather than enabling the dominant group (white South Africans) to understand its past, is a means for it to confirm/legitimize its present position of domination and control. It is thus not insignificant that most South African docudramas, true stories, or fictions confine themselves to a particular period of South African history – the turn of the century – and are screened on TV1, the 'white' channel.

1922: TV drama popularizes history

As noted above, the historical events on which *1922* is based present a rich and complex situation of conflicting interests. Our argument is that although the subject matter is an apparent departure from what we have come to expect from SABC-TV, the form nevertheless provides the means by which the text is recuperable in terms of the institution's overall ideology. Our analysis will show the way in which the documentary and dramatic codes work on each other to produce a preferred reading which is congruent with the state's representations of communists and organized labour as irrational and violent forces which have to be put down by force because they are not amenable to 'rational' negotiation – a point which would have added potency during the State of Emergency when the programme was first aired. In addition to this, the dramatic codes of individual characterization and conflict are used to naturalize the dominant representation of history, which is always told from the victor's perspective, and foregrounds the role of the individual. In this way, too, the marginalization of the primary conflict between the colonizers and the native peoples of South Africa is naturalized.

The documentary look

The series opens with a prologue in which a voice-over gives an 'historical' account of the facts surrounding the 1922 strike: the



1922: Confrontation between the police and Taffy Williams, one of the strike leaders.



1922: Taffy Williams addresses a workers' meeting in Fordsburg.

40 1922, 8-part 'docudrama' written by John Cundhill, directed by Edgar Bold, produced by The Independent Film Centre, Johannesburg, broadcast on SABC-TV1 beginning 10 May 1984, and again in 1991, beginning 14 August.

41 1922 would probably be located towards the latter end of the continuum, as it fits John Caughie's description of 'factions' which are 'constructed along firm dramatic, or melodramatic lines, their "documentariness" coming from the actuality of their historical referent'.

42 Cundhill, 1922.

fall in the gold price which threatened the loss of white mine labour to lesser paid black labour, thus necessitating the need for a strike; World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution which were symptomatic of world-wide economic conflict; and the alliance between the 'radical socialists' and Afrikaner nationalists who were 'united in their determination to fight for their rights'.⁴⁰ This information is offered over a combination of contemporary black and white stills and film footage showing white miners on the march, the commando units, and impoverished-looking white working-class families. This is intercut with black and white stills from the production, 1922, focusing on key characters: the Moodie family, the Afrikaner shift boss who remains at work, and Afrikaner bully-boy scab-hunters. The text does not identify these characters as characters in the drama, thereby fusing documentary footage with dramatic footage, or fact with fiction (thus creating the 'faction' described by Caughie).⁴¹ The prologue concludes with the voice-over: 'The Moodies, like the characters in this story, belong to the realm of fiction but are based on fact. The troubles which beset those families, were the troubles of the times.'⁴² It implies that the values of, and conflicts which beset, the Moodie family and other characters in the drama are representative of actual conflicts. In so doing, the voice-over, a documentary code, creates an identity between the dramatic and documentary aspects of the production. This cues the audience to understand the dramatic conflicts as actual, historical conflicts. As the dramatic conflicts are figured through the device of individual conflict, the audience is thus encouraged to understand historical, social conflicts in terms of the conflicts between individuals.

The camera then cuts to sepia-coloured images of key characters and scenes over which the credits are run. The difference between the black and white footage and sepia footage is to demarcate 'fact' and 'history' from the drama. We then cut to natural colour, and a sub-title 'Coronation Deep 1938', signifying present time. In other words, the drama is signalled by both sepia and natural colour. The drama thus starts in 1938 with Quentin Moodie – dressed like a boss – returning to inaugurate the electrification of Coronation Deep mine. His meeting with a young secretary who resembles his former love, Iris Robinson, and his stroll through the mine compound trigger his memory of the 1922 strike. It is this dramatic device which enables the story of the strike to be told. We then cut between time present (1938) – signalled by natural colour – and past time (1922) – signalled by sepia – in which we see many of the key events of the whole narrative. This device has two effects. First, it conflates personal memory with history. In this way, the character's history *in* the struggle, in which he arguably plays a central role, is conflated with the history *of* the struggle. This is a liberal view of

history in which not only is individual conflict the driving force of history, but is also often told from the point of view of the victors of history: epitomized in this case by Quentin Moodie, the young individual miner who stands against the mass (depicted as 'mob'), and who returns as mine boss to tell the tale. This is confirmed by his characterization as a pragmatic winner – surviving the Great War, winning at tennis and love – who only loses when it is to secure long-term gains.

The second effect of the use of his memory and its coding in sepia is to associate his memory with the historic real (shown by the black and white documentary footage). Sepia has the connotation of old photographs, the past captured. By coding the character's past in sepia, which is then associated with the real history, a slippage is effected between the actual (shown first in black and white) and his memory. A fusion is thus created between the documented history (black and white footage) and dramatic memory (sepia). This fusion is further enhanced (within the sepia code) by including in 'his flashbacks', events at which he wasn't even present. In other words, subjective experience is presented as objective 'fact' or 'history'. In Caughie's words, 'the rhetoric of the documentary establishes the experience of the real and places it in a system of guarantees and confirmations'.⁴³

⁴³ Caughie, 'Progressive Television', p. 30.

Another way in which a fusion is effected between the documented history and its dramatic rendering is by the way in which the codes of naturalism secure a reality effect for the drama. This is evident in the mise-en-scene, and references to real places (Fordsburg) and real people (Smuts, Creswell). This fusion between documented history and its dramatization has two effects. First, it encourages a view of history as being self-contained and encapsulated in past moments and events, rather than as the product of particular discourses emanating from particular historical conjunctures. And secondly, it places the audience in a particular relation to the text which encourages a reading of the text as real historical knowledge, rather than as dramatic fiction told from a particular point of view.

The dramatic look

The dramatic focus of the programme is the fate of the Moodie family during the 1922 strike, which is initiated by the main character Quentin Moodie's reveries of the strike. Once he has embarked on these reveries, we remain in the domain of the dramatic, marked by sepia colouring. This diegetic world is elaborated by what Caughie calls 'the dramatic look'. By this he

means those stylistic devices typical of the classical Hollywood narrative:

the system of looks and glances which is familiar from fictional film, and which works to produce the consistency and movement of the narrative, placing the spectator in relation to it . . . eyeline match, field/reverse-field, point-of-view.⁴⁴

The function of this 'dramatic look' is to 'give the narrative a centre, [it] orders the heterogeneity of the world "captured" by the documentary look, and establishes privileged figures and events'.⁴⁵ In other words, the 'dramatic look' enables a story to be produced from the raw material of the documentary, and in so doing, transforms a complex situation into a simple narrative structure which marks out the trajectory of key individuals. Caughie points out that this structure can so impose itself on the documentary that our concern is focused on the dramatic outcomes, rather than with the social issues documented. Thus in 1922 the strike issue ends with the deaths of the brother and lover of Quentin Moodie. This is the prelude to the final scene of the film which ends with the mother's funeral, a scene which enables us to see the fates of her remaining family: her husband's nearby grave; Quentin married to the boss's daughter; and her daughter, Kate, married to the Afrikaner strike-leader, Deon Fouche. Thus our lasting impressions are not rooted in the historical conflicts, but in the fates of characters.

The historical situation thus becomes merely the backdrop against which the dramatic characters come to life.⁴⁶ Because the classical narrative focuses on privileged individuals who are characterized by particular traits, only those aspects of the historical situation pertaining to this characterization are dealt with. This narrativization of history creates a tension between the demands of the dramatic, and the historic real in which it is rooted. So, for example, black miners are marginalized in the drama because their presence plays no part in this particular narrative rendering of history – which is primarily concerned with the relationship between Boer and Brit. In scriptwriter John Cundhill's words, 'It was mainly white against white, with blacks playing a passive, background role, just as they do in South African politics'.⁴⁷ But as Duncan Innes, author of *Anglo American and the Rise of Modern South Africa*, commented: 'if Mr Cundhill had been less ideologically blinkered in his approach to 1922 he might have seen how crucial black miners were to those events and might also have been more sympathetic in his treatment of the strikers'.⁴⁸ We use this quote not to suggest that Cundhill's dramatic treatment is inappropriate as drama, but rather that in passing itself off as *the* account of the situation

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 27. Caughie sees a connection between Zola's notion of the 'experimental method' – setting in motion a narrative situation within a carefully observed material world and then observing the results – and docudrama, which 'seems to produce its analysis by setting in motion a dramatic experiment within the world observed and constructed by the documentary look'.

⁴⁷ Cundhill, 'Of ivory towers and stop-watches', *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 July 1984, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Duncan Innes, 'Did TV's 1922 depict the factual events of the day?', *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 July, 1984, p. 8.

49 Caughie, 'Progressive television', p. 30.

(rather than as *an* account), it is ideological. This particular, subjective, narrative construction of the strike is then naturalized and transformed into history by the documentary look discussed above. In this way the narrative element becomes dominant, ensuring that the drama provides audiences with the 'experience of history – memory – rather than its analysis'.⁴⁹ It is precisely in this way that the drama functions ideologically, for it allows highly ideological representations to be slipped in, or naturalized (through the drama). Other examples which function in this way include the stereotypical portrayal of Taffy Williams, the Communist strike-leader who, it is alleged, uses labour disputes for political ends; the representation of strikers either as an easily swayed mob, or as louts and thugs who go scab-bashing; the representation of the bosses as rational decision-makers; the way in which working-class culture is viewed from the perspective of the upper classes; and the way in which Afrikaners are represented from the rather superior point of view of the English. These representations potentially gain an added potency because they connect with a much wider South African intertextual context which is virulently anti-communist and anti-organized labour.

The discursive field of the text is, however, more complex than indicated above. For example, the capitalists are not presented in a wholly favourable light (the intransigence of Sir Julian, the mine manager); and a sympathetic view of the Afrikaners is secured through the portrayal of one of the Afrikaner strikers, the plight of his family living in abject poverty, and his desire to overturn British domination. In other words, within the ideological bounds discussed above, the text does attempt to give voice to a heterogeneity of discourses – some of which are recuperated (the representation of Taffy as a 'radical socialist', and the young socialist, Oliver, as naive: neither of whom is allowed to survive), and others of which are completely marginalized (black miners). This complexity can perhaps be explained by the contradictory position that drama occupies on television. In the United Kingdom, for example, it has the connotation of 'quality television', as distinct from other popular forms.⁵⁰ While it does not have that connotation in South Africa, it is differentiated from other television productions by being closely associated with its author. Thus a John Cundhill/Edgar Bold production connotes that which is different from other run-of-the-mill SABC-TV fare. A significant aspect of this difference, we would argue, is that these authored productions are allowed to articulate a personal voice which does not dovetail perfectly with that of the bardic voice of the SABC. That this tension exists is evident in Cundhill's defence of his marginalization of black miners: 'How, in the circumstances,

50 Ibid., p. 30.

51 Cundhill, 'Of ivory towers', p. 8.

52 SABC-TV publicity leaflet
(Johannesburg, n.d.)

could I have featured blacks more significantly? And in ways that would have been acceptable to the SABC?'⁵¹

Conclusion

In this paper we have used the historical drama *1922* to probe the nature of television in South Africa. We chose *1922* because it was a seemingly anomalous programme on SABC-TV, written by a script writer who consciously probed the limits of what was ideologically acceptable to the SABC. The SABC-TV press release described the programme as 'examining that savage summer of 1922 through the bitter experiences of the Moodie family, who were victims of people's desperate struggle for no more than the right to earn a living wage . . .'.⁵² We argue, however, that while the programme was ostensibly about this richly contested moment in South African history, it nevertheless encodes a preferred reading which concurs with the culturally dominant representations of this history. It is in this way, we suggest, that it functions as folktale or fable, and is thus easily incorporated into the bardic discourse of SABC-TV.

An American Raj in Filmistan: images of Elvis in Indian films

AMIT RAI

The King never played Bombay. But they knew him there: by the early 1960s, images of Elvis were as familiar to Indian urban youth as those of Pandit Nehru or the Mahatmah. But what did 'Elvis' mean to people? In 1958, when the question of whether rock 'n' roll should be banned from Indian theatres was debated, a Madras legislator, asked to define this new phenomenon, remarked, 'I have heard it is an obscene dance performed by men and women'.¹ That same year, as *Jailhouse Rock* (Richard Thorpe, 1957) opened across the country, youths tore apart the theatre halls and rock 'n' roll became a national heresy.

With its symbols of glamour, rebellion and defiant sexuality, rock 'n' roll became a problem for the ruling elites – a problem of transnational culture in a time of postcolonial consolidation; a problem of legitimating authority in a time of armed uprisings; a problem of normalizing sexuality within a growing national consciousness of 'the woman's question'. The appropriation of the Elvis image by Indian film stars occurred within an historical space where all the different strands of imperialism, gender domination and nation-building had to be negotiated *at once*. It is this negotiation – signalled by the crisis of authentic representation² – which I hope to trace here by looking at two movies, *College Girl* and *Bluffmaster*. Both films star Shammi Kapoor, the paradigmatic Elvis figure of Indian films in the late 1950s and 1960s, and both employ certain common representations of Elvis, yet they diverge markedly in their final orientation towards the symbology of the King of Rock 'n' Roll.

1 Eric Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film* (New York: OUP, 1980), pp. 215–16.

2 I am thinking here of Spivak's distinction between representing and re-presenting in 'Can the subaltern speak', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988); also her critique of the 'native informant syndrome' in 'Naming Gayatri Spivak', *Stanford Humanities Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, (1989).

... every discussion of cinema made outside Hollywood must begin with Hollywood ... (Glauber Rocha)

3 Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, p. 1

4 Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 37.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

6 Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St Louis: Telos Press, 1981), p. 118

On July 7, 1896, a *Times of India* advertisement invited Bombay residents to witness 'the marvel of the century, the wonder of the world' at Watson's Hotel that same day.³ The marvel was film. Just a few months earlier, film technology had been introduced to Europe by the Lumière brothers. As a technology, silent films became the perfect commodities for industrial capitalism: almost completely exchangeable (no linguistic barriers, although certainly some cultural ones) and even adaptable (in India commentaries were often simultaneously spoken with the film's action by local orators – who would translate the cultural differences into an intelligible idiom). From the very start, film was enmeshed within the circuits of commodity exchange, and it is the peculiarity of film as an object to be bought and sold which has 'defined the structure of the film industry. Just about all the financial outlay in film production goes into the making of the master negative and the first print.'⁴ This was no small matter. Since it took huge amounts of capital investment even to begin a film project, few Indians could think of making a film. The financial backing for most films came from private investors, which kept the film industry from being an exclusive province of the state, binding it more closely to the exigencies of the marketplace.⁵

This does not mean, however, that Indian films were slavish pawns of market mechanisms. Rather, the production of signs and commodities were deeply imbricated within each other. Ideology, in such a view, is not a mysterious duping of consciousness – a material force, traversing both the production of signs and material productions – but 'a social logic that is substituted for another (and which resolves the latter's contradictions), thus changing the very definition of value'.⁶ The social logic of western imperialism is bound thoroughly to this process of revaluing, a process which rationalized the 'natives' as subhuman and simultaneously began to rationalize the production process.

In India the codes of film – both within the symbology of western aesthetics, and western technology – were appropriated, broken, and remoulded to resist, dominate, and survive. Appropriating these codes was never a matter of simply negating British domination, although it might have been represented as such. Rather it was a negotiation which existed in a space and time 'of antagonistic or contradictory elements', the analysis of which cannot take comfort within either 'the idealism of a dialectic which enables the emergence of a teleological or transcendent History, or the "scientism" of symptomatic reading where the nervous tics on the surface of ideology reveal "the real

7 Homi K. Bhabha 'The commitment to theory', in Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (eds), *Questions of Third Cinema*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1989), p. 118.

8 Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy', *Public Culture*, (vol. 2, no. 2, (1990), p. 5.

9 As Roy Armes often does.

10 Paul Gilroy, *There ain't no black in the Union Jack*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 17.

11 These 200 years had seen India's forceful incorporation into the capitalist world, destroying many local systems of trade and production. The cultivation of export crops required in the West had displaced the growing of food for local consumption, 'just as taxation under colonialism drew millions from traditional societies into the cash economy, and disruption of traditional agriculture and land ownership patterns provoked the rural exodus' into urban slums. Armes, *Third World Film Making*, p. 13.

12 Ibid., p. 105.

13 Ranajit Guha, 'Dominance without hegemony', in Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies VI*, (Delhi: OUP, 1986), p. 270.

materialist contradiction" that History embodies'.⁷ Such a critique would attempt to see the imagination as a social practice. As Arjun Appadurai has explained:

No longer mere fantasy (opium of the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (both in the form of labour and of culturally organized practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency ('individuals') and globally defined fields of possibility.⁸

The critic (postcolonial or other) cannot rely on the redemption of attributing the implacable contradictions of Indian film to petty bourgeois ideology or false consciousness.⁹ Thus, my analysis below, and also the counter-narrative that I weave, attempts, in the words of Paul Gilroy, to examine meanings 'not as an autonomous branch of ideology, but as a salient feature in a general process whereby culture mediates the world of agents and the structures which are created by their social praxis. These meanings are sources of the individual and collective actions which give culture its materiality.'¹⁰

These negotiated meanings, however, took place within the contingencies of an equally implacable imperialism. Initially, then, film in India was a 'foreign' technology, often perceived as a tool of Europe and part of its dominating project, which in India had by then already been nearly a 200-year-old operation.¹¹ By 1913 (the year the first Indian film was made) Indian industrialization was well under way – the first iron and steel plants had already been set up, although this industrial production was limited to just a few products and geographically contained within virtual enclaves around the three great urban centres: Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras.¹²

Ranjit Guha has rather rigidly defined this imperial project in India as 'a dominance without hegemony'; a dominance which relied more on coercion than on persuasion, more on forced obedience to order than on the right to dissent.¹³ But in the colonial context, issues of culture were clearly central to effective domination; thus politics under the British Raj were not a question of a *pre-representational* struggle – signs and their meanings were matters of life and death. Rather, lacking the productive forces of a western-style hegemony (an industrialization which at best engendered a semi-proletarianization of the indigenous population, or the cultural apparatuses to manufacture consent) the colonial regime saw *any* expression of indigenous culture as a threat to their precarious dominance. Thus creating

the openly ideological and openly conflictual nature of Indian films. In the postcolonial era of national consolidation – a process which was also conducted in the absence of any elaborate apparatus for the dissemination of its brand of culture – censorship assumed paranoid proportions in independent India.

Under the British Raj this censorship was aimed at a number of different issues. One of these was the influence of Hollywood, which was associated very early on with industrialization and modernity. As Anil Saari writes:

[Film] became a symbol of industrialization and of the new world-society, as India plunged into an attempt to transform itself and enter the 20th-century. Indeed, the cinema theatre became the new temple.¹⁴

This signifier of modernity gradually slipped into a metonym for 'America', since, in only a few short years, US film producers dominated the industry. Significantly, it was at just the moment when US expansionism was wreaking havoc in the colonized world: the military intervention in Cuba during the Spanish-American War; the diversion of movements for independence in both Cuba and the Philippines; the annexation of Hawaii. This virile expansion was accompanied, produced and assisted by a cultural domination that had worldwide impact, such that by the 1920s Hollywood was 'the world's leading producer of films, with a monopoly control over the world's richest domestic film market, [and] was able to achieve an effortless hold over world cinema – occupying well over 60 per cent of screen time in Europe (the richest export market) and up to 80 to 90 per cent in parts of Asia and Latin America'.¹⁵ Clearly, from the 1930s on, in India, '[w]hen one talks of cinema, one talks of American cinema. The influence of cinema is the influence of American cinema, which is the most aggressive and widespread aspect of American culture throughout the world.'¹⁶ This caused a great deal of alarm to both the Indian nationalist and the Liberal Imperialist. For both, issues of controlling cultural production became central.

From the very beginning, colonial authorities justified censorship on grounds of 'decency' or 'respect', rarely on the exigencies of political domination. Consequently,

when instances of censorship were examined, political reasons loomed large. While the other arguments for censorship were advanced earnestly and with evident sincerity, it is notable that all these arguments, coming from Indians and non-Indians alike, laid the basis for a strict political censorship.¹⁷

The British in India cared little about developing an indigenous film industry. They were far more concerned with censoring political issues out of films. (Kissing for example, was allowed in

14 Beatrix Pfeleiderer and Lothar Lütze (eds), *The Hindi Film: Agent and Reagent of Cultural Change* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985), p. 22.

15 Armes, *Third World Film Making*, pp. 46–7.

16 Glauber Rocha quoted in Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, p. 35.

17 Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film* p. 35.

18 Ames, *Third World Film Making*, p. 109. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy comment, 'Although kisses, even between Indians, had occasionally been permitted in the 1930s – the royal lovers in *Karma* kissed several times – kissing became strictly taboo after Independence'. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy *Indian Film*, p. 124.

19 For instance, in the early thirties the Indian Cinematograph Committee (set up by the British, but on which also sat elite Indians) submitted a report claiming that 'Western films are misunderstood' – a misunderstanding which tends 'to discredit Western civilization in the eyes of the masses in India' – finally urging that 'cheap American films' should be allowed only limited access into the country. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

20 For a discussion of the role of 'pilgrimages' and the formation of national identities, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991), p. 140.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

22 Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and difference', p. 6.

23 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 140. For example, as the Congress party mobilized symbols of resistance to British imperialism – the spinning wheel, *Khadi* cloth, salt, etc., – these symbols would flicker across the screen to be greeted by the wild cheers of the audience.

Indian silent cinema.)¹⁸ Also, for colonial authority to maintain its own authentic character, Hollywood – condemned for making those 'cheap American films' – needed to be replaced with imported British films.¹⁹ Such condemnations also implicitly attacked those indigenous filmmakers who were not themselves authentic enough: not British enough for the imperialist, not nationalist enough for the Congress Party. Despite these formidable challenges, however, Indian filmmakers managed to survive and even thrive.

India's new temple, as the old, was a place of pilgrimage for the moviegoers; a place where an imagined national identity was nurtured.²⁰ The silent film in India bridged gaps between the literature and illiterate, one regional language and another – gaps which could not be bridged by newspapers. As Benedict Anderson points out:

advances in communications technology, especially radio and television, give print allies unavailable a century ago. Multilingual broadcasting can conjure up the imagined community to illiterates and populations with different mother-tongues. . . . In a world in which the national state is the overwhelming norm, all of this means that nations can now be imagined without linguistic communality – not in the naive spirit of *nosotros los Americanos*, but out of a general awareness of what modern history has demonstrated to be possible.²¹

These imaginings were not uncontested. Muslims were often excluded from joining in the patriotic fervour of an emerging nation, tribal folk (if represented) were exoticized and, from the very first film, light-skinned Indians were valorized as the ideal of beauty. In the words of Arjun Appadurai, 'One man's imagined community is another man's political prison'.²²

Nonetheless, within a context of British domination, Indian films managed to depict the longings of an 'emerging' nation. Occasionally, the intelligentsia used film as a way of bypassing 'print in propagating the imagined community' of the nation, and, further, 'not merely to illiterate masses, but even to literate masses reading different languages'.²³ Initially though, Indian films were almost entirely mythologicals, that is, movies depicting various stories from the two great Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, or other religious stories – thus, by definition, excluding Muslims, Christians and other religious groups.

Made in 1913 by Dadasaheb Phalke, *Raja Harischandra* was India's first film. Although the story was taken from Hindu mythology, Phalke was inspired by a western film on the life of

24 Ames, *Third World Film Making*, pp. 58–60.

25 Ibid., p. 30.

26 Ibid., p. 38.

27 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 133–4.

28 'It was Bombay that had been affected most by the war boom and the influx of foreigners it had brought. It was especially in Bombay that adventurer producers had injected a new gambling air into the film field. Bombay had become the Indian glamour capital. It was in Bombay that star salaries rose most sharply.' Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, p. 151. See also Manjunath Pendakur, in John A. Lent (ed.) *The Asian Film Industry* (Austin: University of Texas, 1990), p. 231.

Christ, which made him resolve to film similar accounts of Indian religious subjects.²⁴ This strange genesis highlights the issues of cultural syncretism which are constitutive of all Indian films. A foreign technology, used by indigenous elites helping to engender a sense of national identity, film in India has always been a concatenation of contradictory strands of domination and transgression.

With the advent of 'talkies' (movies with synchronized sound) in 1931, questions of language, authenticity, hybridity and nation-building erupted onto the field of national(ist) discourse. First of all, regional linguistic differences (some 845 separate languages or dialects were reported in the 1951 census)²⁵ could not now be circumvented as had been possible with silent films. Roy Ames elaborates the problem of film in the colonized countries with the advent of sound technology:

[Synchronized dialogue] gave the erstwhile fully international medium of film a quite new identity, enmeshed in vernacular languages and nascent nationalism. Linguistic barriers, hitherto characteristic only of print and publishing empires, now began to operate in the case of film as well. As a result, although all the impetus for the change-over to sound came from the West, the ability to offer films in local languages, and particularly with local songs and dances, allowed Asian, Latin American and Egyptian producers to capture the attention of local audiences.²⁶

In the case of India, with a full-blown nationalist movement agitating for home rule, linguistic regionalism was anathema. Linguistic barriers, therefore, became emotionally charged issues, problematic from both the imperialist point of view ('How can we use film to civilize *them* if they can't understand *us*?') as well as from the nationalist point of view ('How can we build *unity* amidst so much difference?'). And these questions were central to ruling, for '[m]uch the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect particular solidarities'.²⁷ Since Hindi films made up about 20 per cent of the total production and were by far the most profitable, the other regional film industries began to look towards Bombay as being at the forefront of Indian films.²⁸ The profit motive having insinuated itself into the dynamics of the film industry from the start, Hindi films became 'All-India' films.

Also with the advent of sound came the ascendancy of the 'song and dance sequence' in almost all movies – at least those that aspired to commercial success. With the addition of the song-dance sequence – *Sangit Natak* – Indian film fulfilled all three *akademis* of the classical aesthetic dramatic form, *drśya kavya* (visible poetry): *Sangit Natak* for music and dance; *Lalit*

²⁹ Lothar Lütze in Pfeleiderer and Lütze (eds), *The Hindi Film*, p. 3.

³⁰ Brahma created 'the *Natyaveda*, the holy book of dramaturgy, by taking the four elements of speech, song, dance and mime from the Vedas . . . And, in consonance with the Hindu view of life, was added the dictum that drama should not conclude with the defeat or death of the hero. *Bhava*—emotions, and *rasa*—the exalted sentiment or mood which the spectators experience, had pre-eminence over the plot and the structure.' Aruna Vasudev and Philippe Lenglet (eds), *Indian Cinema Superbazaar* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1983), p. 3.

³¹ Pfeleiderer and Lütze (eds), *The Hindi Film*, p. 16.

³² Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, p. 71–2.

Kala for the visual images; *Sahitya* for the dialogues and lyrics.²⁹ The possibility of regarding Indian cinema as an indigenous art form lies in Sanskrit drama, placing it within the tradition of the *Natyaveda*, the holy book of dramaturgy, written as a fifth *Veda*, 'which will be shared by all people' – since the four legitimate *Vedas* were forbidden to the lower castes.³⁰

But to view films only within such narrow aesthetics would be to ignore the historical specificity of mid-twentieth-century colonial and postcolonial India. Combined, mixed, and agonistically thrown together, this was, in fact, the syncretic tradition of the specific form of Indian film. Within this hybrid form, indigenous as well as 'foreign' idioms of thought and sensibility were remoulded to articulate the reality of Indian life. As Anil Saari points out,

Existing in a no-man's land, the popular Indian film or, as may be a more appropriate definition in aesthetic terms, the Indian Pop-film, is an eclectic, assimilative, imitative, and plagiaristic creature that is constantly rebelling against its influences: Hollywood and European cinema and traditional Indian aesthetics and life-styles. . . . Everything that it borrows from the Euro-American film scene it distorts and caricatures. . .³¹

These distorted, or rather refashioned idioms run through Indian films, giving them a texture which evokes hundreds of years of British domination, Moghul rule and subaltern survival. What are (some of) these idioms and what role did they play in the politics of domination under the British Raj and Swaraj?

One of the idioms was the folk tradition of the *jatra*. *Jatra* literally meant a festival, but in Bengali the word also came to be applied to plays performed at festivals. Songs were always a central feature of the *jatra*. As Krishnaswamy and Barnouw write:

There is no doubt that the *jatras* . . . had a powerful hold over large audiences. Some *jatrawalas* were idolized. The *jatra* also became at times an instrument of religious and social reform. The Vaishnavite movement, which rose in the sixteenth century and had the power of love as its central theme, made vigorous use of the *jatra* and other forms of folk music-drama for the lyrical propagation of its teachings. And even in the first decade of the twentieth century Mukanda Das, a Bengali *jatrawala*, is said to have used the medium to urge the reform of Hindu society.³²

The *jatra*, a form of social commentary rooted in the politics of rural mobilization, influenced the form of dance and song of twentieth-century film. On the other hand, western influences, especially after Independence, began to include jazz, blues, rock

'n' roll, Latin rhythms and dances, and traditional European symphony and ballroom dances.

Thus, just as salient an influence on Indian films came in the form of the *Shakespearewallahs*. In rural India, by the end of the nineteenth century, dramaturgy had become so reviled as an art form that for a time it seemed it would drop out of the expressive traditions of India altogether.³³ It was saved from this fate by travelling theatre companies, which helped to repopularize westernized drama. Travelling Shakespearean companies roamed the countryside spreading 'culture'. Importantly, these dramas were not purely European. Speaking of the Parsi theatre, Raghunath Raina remarks,

... the most pervasive influence on the Hindi cinema ... was that of the Parsi theatre in Bombay. The names of the theatrical companies – Alfred, Corinthian, Imperial – are indicative of the fare they presented. ... Among [the] most famous plays were *Sufaid Khoon* (White Blood), modelled on the character of King Lear; *Khwab-e-Hasti* (The Dreamworld of Existence), a mutilated version of Macbeth. ... What characterized the Parsi theatre was a mix of European theatre techniques and Indian folk forms with pageants, farces and operatic dramas. Most of them had a comedy sub-plot. Music was the chief concern. All these elements were completely incorporated in the Indian film and remain its main ingredients even today.³⁴

In having to negotiate between popular rural drama, *uparupakas* 'with their predominance of non-verbal elements such as dance and music',³⁵ 'high' western Shakespearean theatre, and 'high/low' Hindu *Natyaveda*, what emerged as an amalgam dramatic form speaking through various hybrid idioms, a theatrical form which was to have profound effects on popular Indian films.

Distinct from, and often at odds with, these idioms of *Natyaveda* and *Shakespearewallah* Drama, were the popular traditions of *bhakti*, a form of religious worship that centred on mass produced visual images of the Hindu pantheon.³⁶ The visuals in these first films were very much a part of the vernacular traditions of worship. For the plot and thematics, Phalke, for instance, did not engage the 'high' philosophical discourse of the Hindu epics. Rather, he used their ritualistic level, the magical, the miraculous and the spectacular, in the exploits of the Hindu gods and goddesses.³⁷ All these aspects were common motifs of the *bhakti* tradition, the assertion of which signalled a break from High Brahmanical culture, a break that was at once a resistance and a containment.

For this is not all there was to the idiom of *bhakti*; the concept was also a means of control in the hands of the Hindu

33 Armes, *Third World Film Making*, p. 31.

34 Ibid., p. 5.

35 Lothar Lütze in Pfeleiderer and Lütze (eds), *The Hindi Film*, p. 8.

36 For example, Satish Bahadur has noted that the visual values of *Raja Harishchandra* were derived, 'not from the values of Ajanta or Rajput painting, but from the oil paintings of Raju Ravi Varma (d. 1906), who had conceived the Hindu pantheon in the lowest [sic] sentimental values of Victorian paintings and popularized it in cheap reproductions through another mass medium, the colour printing press.' Quoted in Armes, *Third World Film Making*, p. 61.

37 Ibid., p. 61.

upper castes. In its nineteenth-century form, the concept was articulated by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay thus:

Whoever is superior to us and benefits us by his superiority, is an object of Bhakti. The social uses of Bhakti are (1) that the inferior will never act as a follower of the superior unless there is Bhakti; (2) that unless the inferior follows the superior, there cannot be any unity (*aikya*) or cohesion (*bandhan*) in society, nor can it achieve any Improvement (*unnati*).³⁸

In fact, in the mythological origins of the theatrical form in India, drama can be seen as functioning as a diversion which aimed at cohering an exploitative caste society around the benefits of serving 'our superiors'. This *bhakti*, in order to be effective, had to be legitimized through another religious idiom, *Dharma*. *Dharma* is understood here to mean 'the quintessence of "virtue, the moral duty"', although variously it also means simply 'the religion'. This idiom enabled the nationalist elites to represent their cause as a service to God. As Guhu writes:

Wanting both in the material conditions and the culture adequate for this task [of nation-building], its attempt to speak for the nation relied heavily on the traditional idiom of Dharma, with the curious result that something as contemporary as nineteenth and twentieth century nationalism often made its appearance in political discourse dressed up as ancient Hindu wisdom.³⁹

This *dharmic* nationalism, riveted by the contradictions of its own rhetorical pretensions, was also deployed against that ideology of proletarian revolution, Bolshevism. Gandhi, for instance, made no secret of the practical uses he had in mind for his theory of *Dharma*. It was in vehement opposition to socialist theory and in defence of landlordism. 'I enunciated this theory', he said, 'when the socialist theory was placed before the country in respect to the possessions held by zamindars and ruling chiefs'. This identification of Communism and Bolshevism, as 'evils', that is *adharma*, 'corresponds to the dharmic function of trusteeship assigned by Gandhi to indigenous capitalism. . . .'⁴⁰

Drama, employing both the idioms of *bhakti* and *Dharma*, was unabashedly an instrument used to inculcate the normality of the caste hierarchy.⁴¹ The formal aspects of early Indian mythologicals incorporated this tradition into its aesthetics.⁴² *Bhakti* and *Dharma*, then, were idioms of social control, idioms whose history lay in ancient Hindu scriptures, refashioned and rearticulated (but never completely contained) for the needs of the British Raj and, later, for the Nation. In its secular form, *bhakti* in films has a not quite apt correlate in 'hero worship'; the difference being that the religious overtones of *bhakti* have never

38 Quoted in Guha, 'Dominance Without hegemony', p. 261.

39 Ibid., p. 245.

40 Ibid., pp. 247-49.

41 How this Veda may have been used by different interpretive communities, however, is something which I will address below.

42 When Lord Krishna, for instance, appeared on the screen, many rural viewers prostrated themselves in deference, threw money onto the stage, chanted, and did *darshan* (watching of the deity). This practice, in fact, still goes on today during the viewing of the television serials of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

43 Quoted in Guha, 'Dominance without hegemony', p. 271.

44 I am drawing here on Gramsci's articulation(s) of these concepts in the *Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971). For a germane discussion of these concepts see Stuart Hall's essay 'Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity', *Journal of Communication Enquiry*, vol. 11, (1983).

45 Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, p. 216.

46 Barnouw and Krishnaswamy tell the bitterly amusing story of how Indian media officials banned 'hybrid' film music from the radio waves, and began playing exclusively classical music, only to find a few months later that most of the radio sets in India were tuned to Radio Ceylon, which unabashedly played film songs hoping to boost their advertisement sales. 'Many Bombay producers were using lush combinations of fifty or sixty instruments, foreign to Indian classical tradition, and film audiences responded with ecstasy. They had responded likewise to the borrowing of American jazz and Latin-American rhythms. These transformed beyond recognition; to western ears the result sounded Indian, but to Indian purists it sounded western or hybrid. "Hybrid music" became a favourite term of reproach, and the anger with which it was used mounted with the growing popularity of the film songs.... [I]n 1952 this government-operated radio system began a drive against "hybrid music".' Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, p. 157.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

fully dropped out of the idiom, signalling what Lacan called an overdetermined, 'double meaning', 'standing at the same time for "a conflict long dead" and "a present conflict"'.⁴³ As we shall see, in the figure of Krishna-as-trickster, embodied in such actors as Shammi Kapoor, the indigenous echoes of transgression and obedience reverberate.

Obviously, postcolonial film in India exacerbated some of the very same issues of authenticity and culture that marked the colonial period. However, now it was a national elite trying to construct a cohesive, pure and patriotic Indian identity under the (seemingly) hegemonic leadership of Nehru's Congress Party, which had shifted between a war of 'manoeuvre' and 'position' against the British Raj only to continue a war of position against its 'own' unruly people.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, censorship was still a major issue in the film industry. Although the new Constitution had established 'the right to freedom of speech expression', India's First Amendment, adopted in 1951, 'whittled this down by authorizing parliament to enact "reasonable restrictions" on the freedom of speech and expression "in the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence"'. Thus, censorship in independent India acquired an explicit constitutional base, 'which gave the government censorship powers difficult to challenge'.⁴⁵ An ideology of purity was used in an attempt to cleanse India of 'corrupting western influences' and was a force in this conflict of censorship, as in the struggle over film music.⁴⁶ As Krishnaswamy and Barnouw argue, the censor's impulse 'showed itself in a variety of ways, including a determination to enforce stricter decorum in manners and dress'.⁴⁷ Initially, the list of transgressions, which was revised from time to time, included such colonial holdovers as taboos on 'excessively passionate love scenes', 'indelicate sexual situations', 'unnecessary exhibition of feminine underclothing', 'indecorous dancing', 'realistic horrors of warfare', 'exploitation of tragic incidents of war', 'blackmail associated with immorality', 'intimate biological studies', 'gross travesties of the administration of justice', as well as material likely to promote 'disaffection or resistance to Government' or likely to 'wound the susceptibilities of any foreign nation'.⁴⁸ The film industry and the government began a complex feud that was to last more than a decade.⁴⁹ Anxieties of gender, national cohesion and international assimilation are foregrounded quite explicitly by these 'taboos', which, by having attained a certain juridical legitimization, served as a way to naturalize a particular concept of the Indian nation.

The question arises, why these anxieties and not others? The beginnings of an answer can be traced to definitions of Indian

identity that the new independent government wanted to foster and present as (eternally) Indian. These fears underlie any nation-building project. For in acknowledging the hybrid nature of modern Indian culture there lies an 'open possibility' of displacing any norm of 'Indian National Identity'. This 'open possibility . . . is precisely what the institution of absolute sovereignty is designed to counteract and to manage. . . . The open possibility of displacement which metaphor [or syncretism] represents, makes the absolute propriety of meaning and of sovereignty impossible. This is why it must be banished'.⁵⁰ And yet this very possibility, this hybrid identity – which is not quite an identity at all – displaces the dicta of power, uncovering those unnerving moments of ambivalence. Hybridity 'is the effect of uncertainty that afflicts the discourse of power', an anxiety that 'estranges the familiar symbol of [Indian] authority and emerges from its colonial appropriation as the sign of its difference. . . . Hybridity represents the ambivalent "turn" of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification . . .'.⁵¹

And paranoid censorship. As I noted before, from the very outset, the metonymic linkages of film and the broader sign chain, 'American', was a cause of alarm to both British, anti-imperialist nationalist, and, later, the independent nationalist government. In terms of gender, this alarm manifested itself in an attempt to define sexuality in opposition to 'American' crudeness. For in the postwar years, the 'film industry presented itself as the flag-bearer of the American way of life in a world torn apart by cold war tensions,'⁵² causing one overzealous female Indian parliament member to write to Mrs Eisenhower demanding she control Hollywood's lewdness. The Indian government responded to this aggressive cultural expansionism by taking a very negative attitude towards Indian filmmakers.

To many government people, the industry was an agglomeration of irresponsible, fly-by-night units, whose works seemed irrelevant to the great tasks of independence, who were intent on making money by the exploitation of sex and sensation, and who deserved to be dealt with firmly on moral questions – and taxed as severely as possible.⁵³

Thinking of film as a 'potential instrument of social reform that was not being used in that way,'⁵⁴ government officials attempted to legislate the 'correct' aesthetic and moral values. Underlying and undermining such repressive strategies, however, was the common knowledge that the film industry, apart from making films, was also a huge money-laundering operation.⁵⁵ But the government was less interested in – and less capable of – stamping out this rampant fraud than in choking the wild proliferation of potentially unsettling signifiers.

50 Michael Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 5.

51 Homi K Bhabha, 'Signs taken for wonders' in Henry Louis Gates Jr., (ed.), *'Race', Writing and Difference*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 174.

52 Armes, *Third World Film Making*, p. 49.

53 Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, p. 218.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 139.

55 For instance, many actors and actresses would be paid in untaxable 'black' money. Under the Raj, this untaxable exchange was a mark of nationalist patriotism – to deny what the Raj demanded was to engage in noncooperation. After independence, however, this rationalization faded away and laid bare the naked venality of an industry largely run through corrupt speculation, blackmail, and outright fraud. (Armes, *Third World Film Making*, p. 115).

Another anxiety that remained an unstated ground for censorship was outright armed rebellion. From 1944 until 1951 the Telengana movement became the first widespread sustained armed struggle of peasants against rural oppression. During the movement, led by the Communist Party of India, a large area (originally part of Hyderabad State ruled by the Nizam) was administered by the peasants' representatives. The princely state was merged with the rest of India after Independence in 1947, following a police action by the Central Government. The brutal liquidation of the Movement followed. As Shahani notes, this armed uprising had repercussions in all areas of government administration, while 'reformism in the arts took over almost completely – it was thought necessary to reach the masses at any cost'.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Kumar Shahani in Kishore Valicha, *The Moving Image*, (London: Sangam Books, 1988), p. 74.

The 'masses' of course became that Other, which needed 'moulding', 'cultivation', and 'discipline'. What is characteristic about the optic of the government was an inverted Orientalism. This Orientalism which, by the nineteenth century, had come to predominate in western knowledge of the East, defined India as 'passive, other-worldly, tradition-ridden, esoteric, caste-dominated, and therefore weak, backward and unchanging'.⁵⁷ In the interests of an oppositional ideology, nationalism inverted this discourse. In the words of Partha Chatterjee:

⁵⁷ Richard G Fox, 'Gandhian Socialism and Hindu Nationalism', in Sugata Bose (ed.) *South Asia and World Capitalism*, (Delhi: OUP, 1990), p. 248.

... nationalism in colonial countries is premised on opposition to alien rule, in this case by a western power. But it is vitally important to emphasize that this opposition occurs within a body of knowledge about the East (large parts of it purporting to be scientific) which has the same representational structure and shares the same theoretical framework as Orientalism. . . . [The oriental in nationalist discourse] is not passive, non-participating. He is seen to possess a 'subjectivity' which he can himself 'make'. In other words while his relationship to himself and to others has been 'posed, understood and defined' by others, ie by an objective scientific consciousness, by Knowledge, by Reason, those relationships are not acted by others. His subjectivity he thinks is active, autonomous and sovereign.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Partha Chatterjee, 'Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies III* (New York: OUP, 1984), p. 155.

Thus, in a reversal of racist stereotypes, the administration's censoring policies were aimed at 'nurturing' in 'the masses' an opposition to the Imperial Other – America or Britain or the West. The Village, Tradition, and History became those signs through which an indigenous nationalist project of counter-appropriation would be rearticulated.⁵⁹ Certainly, this was an overdetermined response, indicative of the pressures of western capital to establish India as a neocolonial satellite; of the pushes and pulls of the heightening Cold War; of the horrors of

⁵⁹ Guha, 'Dominance without hegemony', p. 212.

60 'Pakistan' means literally the 'land of the pure'. See Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India* (New York: OUP, 1989), p. 317.

partition from the Land of the Pure.⁶⁰ In the hurricane of these forces, where there was no calm eye, Indian films negotiated their existence.

To the nationalist purists of the 1950s and 1960s, therefore, the Indian Pop film was at best something to be tolerated, and at worst something that needed to be purged altogether. These films were derided as hybrid art forms, 'formula films' containing a few basic features. These,

as dictated by exhibitor and distributor, called for one or two major stars at least half a dozen songs, and a few dances. The story was of declining importance. It was conceived and developed toward one objective: exploitation of the idolized star. . . . In backgrounds and characters there was strong bias towards the glamorous. Obstacles were usually provided by villainy or accident, not by social problems. Dance and song provided conventionalized substitutes for love-making and emotional crisis. . . . All this was to some extent in the ancient Indian tradition.⁶¹

61 Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, p. 155.

This would be an apt description of Indian Pop film if one were to remain completely blind to its historical and cultural context. One of the problems with this reductive definition is that it leaves out many of the idioms of traditional folk culture that I outlined above, which saw various *jatrawallah* as social types as well as individuals. Thus, a villain is not merely a sovereign individual representing abstract evil, rather s/he is also representative of a social category, a metonym for diverse social forces. In the view just quoted, however, this particular social context is obliterated.

There is one aspect of the formula film that is crucial in locating it within a broader political system of signification: the fetishized image. To make a fetish of something means to invest it with powers it does not have in itself.

It is not that we see powers in things which are not present (that would be pure illusion) but that we think that the powers a product does have belong to it directly as a thing, rather than as a result of specific human actions that give it the power in the first place. . . . In short, fetishism consists of seeing the meaning of things as an inherent part of their integration into a system of meaning.⁶²

62 Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 28-9.

Under market relations, signs (such as Elvis or Madonna) are turned into fetishes, evacuated of a specific history, and become exchangeable with(in) other sign systems. For instance, the fetishization of jazz in India displaces the histories of exploitation and oppression from which that black expressive tradition emerged. As Baudrillard has put it, 'Fetishism is actually attached

⁶³ Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy*, p. 93.

⁶⁴ Eileen R Meehan, 'Technical capability versus corporate imperatives: toward a political economy of cable television and information diversity' in Vincent Mosco and Janet Wosko (eds), *The Political Economy of Information*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 181.

⁶⁵ Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising*, pp. 56–7.

⁶⁶ Guha, 'Dominance without hegemony', p. 271.

⁶⁷ Images of James Dean, Rock Hudson and, later, James Bond were also popular material for Indian actors.

to the sign object, the object eviscerated of its substance and history, and reduced to the state of marking a difference, epitomizing a whole system of differences'.⁶³ Thus, 'Jazz' as a signifier becomes exchangeable with any other sign, mobilizing what was once a context-bound relation between genres into a more fluid relation between cultures. 'Elvis' once shorn of his own hybrid status as a cultural icon, once de-articulated from the Blues and Gospel traditions from which his music emerged, could then stand in at times for an 'antiauthoritarianism', 'American' (with all its own metonymic associations), or simply 'Other'. 'Elvis' becomes a generic signifier, ripped from any fixed signified. This regularization into manufacturing categories (genres of music or film: for instance, mambo or *bhangra*) allows producers to cultivate a demand for generic cultural commodities in audiences (say for Elvis or James Bond). Such commodities are produced according to a complex formula specifying the available pool of narrative, aural, visual, and human components from which workers, producers, actors, and writers select a particular configuration for a particular film. The profitability of any commodity validates both the formulae used in constructing the object and the genre as a whole. In the world-wide mass production of entertainment, such a success spurs imitation of that particular commodity (the image of Elvis) as well as a resurgence of production within the genre across different media (the hybrid song).⁶⁴

Within the postcolonial context of India, commodity fetishism is only one of the strands that go into the sign system of these films: in any particular instance all the various idioms combine, braid, collapse, echo and blend together to produce what rather simplistically may be termed the fetish. And the result, as Sut Jhally (drawing on Michael Taussig) has noted,

is the development of practices representing a blend of old fetishisms with other elements, devised in response to pressures exerted on traditional societies in the twentieth century by market forces operating on a global scale. . . . [M]aterials from older fetishistic practices were adapted and transformed, in order to provide a workable representation of what was happening to the relation between human agents and the material world upon the introduction of wage labour.⁶⁵

What is past is not dead; what is Elvis is also Krishna; what is 'modern' or 'foreign' must struggle with what came before if it is to take root; such negotiations are dispersed throughout the entire range of power relations.⁶⁶ The question may now be posed: Why Elvis? Why not some other figure? I would suggest that in fact the appropriation of Elvis (by no means the only image that was being appropriated at the time)⁶⁷ came at a

Shammi and Sharmila. Picture
courtesy of Ratna.



moment when government censorship, the US Camelot, the hysteria of rock 'n' roll, the growing problems of poverty and violent caste/class conflict and their suppression, found themselves articulated in a certain moment of rage – and it could only be a hybrid moment. Truly, the moment of domination and resistance in the postcolonial film is the moment of the hybrid mimic, the moment when Shammi Kapoor, tilting his head like that amorous American King, says in English, 'I love you'.

In this context, then, mimicry of the colonizer/West represents the potential sabotage of domination. This concept of mimicry has been brilliantly developed and elaborated by Homi K Bhabha. First of all, the native mimic is the product of western epistemes, western culture and often an agent of colonial surveillance. Yet, colonial mimicry implies a certain ambivalence: 'in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its

68 Homi K Bhabha, 'Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse', *October*, no. 28, (1984), p. 126.

69 Ibid., p. 126.

70 Ibid., p. 131.

71 Robert Young, *White Mythologies* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 82.

72 Ibid.

73 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism', *Critical Inquiry*, 12: 1, (1985).

slippage, its excess, its difference'.⁶⁸ This is so because mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, the 'not quite right' (Shammi Kapoor could never really be an *authentic* Elvis), a signifier of 'difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers'.⁶⁹ Thus, the strategy of mimicry opens up a moment of ambivalence where the 'fetishized colonial culture' becomes a potentially 'insurgent counter-appeal'.⁷⁰ Within the context of colonial domination, questions of mimicry are charged with the insurgency of displacement. This mimicry recalls the Deleuzian reversal between a 'good' copy and a 'bad' copy, where 'precisely because it is a bad copy, it breaks down all adequation between copy and model, appearance and essence, event and Idea'.⁷¹ This slippage, this excess of meaning that the mimic plays upon and occupies, acts to dethrone the Original from its assumed position of Truth. Further, as Robert Young elaborates:

because the bad copy by definition cannot claim to be copying anything but itself, it creates its 'original' retroactively, so that the copy precedes the original in a ghostly originary repetition.⁷²

This mimicry has implications for how the Original itself is constructed as a consolidated, discrete entity. Truly, as Spivak has pointed out, the paradigmatic modality of imperialism is its ability to consolidate itself through the colonial Other.⁷³ But the colonized strategy of mimicry disrupts any such consolidation. The symbol of Origins becomes a sign, slipping into hybridized ambivalence: the fetishized symbol of the USA, Elvis, becomes a signifier for anti-government protest. The mimic-hybrid, therefore, marks the opening to a 'conflictual economy', rather than a cooptation, or a simple 'plagiarism of the West'. In the postcolonial context, such mimicry within a hybrid chronotope is inflected with the histories of colonial domination that have gone before (but which still linger), and is also charged with the exigencies of the shifting dynamics of national consolidation.

But the questions might be asked: Who gets to mimic? Who is allowed into that hybrid space? If everyone is a hybrid then can we not sit back and enjoy the euphoria of the ludic postcolonial moment, where the hip hybrid is shorn of burdensome interpellations by such vulgar phenomena as caste, colour, gender and class. Or as Mas'ud Zavarzadeh has polemicized it:

Ludic theories essentialize resistance as an ethical imperative and consequently – as in all forms of ludic postmodernism ethics – posit an ahistorical subject who overcomes the

74 Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, *Seeing Films Politically* (New York: SUNY Press, 1991), p. 33.

75 Quoted in Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 146.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 149.

77 Homi K Bhabha, 'Interrogating identity' in *Identity Documents*, no. 6, (1990). This is something that Zavarzadeh often tends to do, to desire that liberatory Utopia of negation. To me, such a politics leads straight to the Gulag.

78 Spivak, 'Deconstructing Historiography', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV* (New York: OUP, 1985), p. 341 and Hall, 'Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity', p. 17.

dominant regimes of subjectivities by virtue of his natural human abilities. . . . The subject of 'resistance' in these theories, in other words, is the sovereign ethical subject who in his natural freedom ('human rights') – which is grounded in the ethics of resistance pleasures and guaranteed by body politics – takes charge of his destiny and transcends the historical structures of economic domination and political power.⁷⁴

There is some validity to this critique. For instance, Bhabha rarely discusses the historical, positional differences between the woman mimic and the man mimic, the upper caste mimic and the poor, lower caste mimic; neither does he ask what were the alternatives to such mimicry that a particular historical moment has stifled in the first place? But, on the other hand, Bhabha never makes any claims to transcendence for the mimic-hybrid. Hybridity is not a resistance that *overcomes* – negates – domination, it is a resistance that *survives* – negotiates – it. Further, in Bhabha's rejection of any consistent metalanguage of History, in his avoidance of reified categories of 'the subaltern' (a strategy that he has referred to as 'theoreticist anarchism') in these discursive strategies themselves are encoded complex resistances to the discursive modalities of western metaphysics.⁷⁵ Seen in these ways, Bhabha's theory leads elsewhere. Two very different aspects of Bhabha's colonial mimicry must be discerned here, then. First, Bhabha's mimic-hybrid cannot be seen as a sovereign subject, removed from an assortment of historical power relations; in such a contingent space and time, *any* discussion of resistance as such must, I would argue, resist the facile trap of 'describing a forgotten moment of historical resistance', where that resistance remains inarticulate 'until the interpreter comes a hundred and seventy years later' (or thirty) to 'read between the lines and rewrite history'.⁷⁶ Such resistance would then become the new metaphysics, as 'imagination-as-social-practice' becomes effectively the 'imaginings-of-the-social(ist) critic'. And, simultaneously, the mimic-hybrid should not be subsumed into 'a celebratory, oppositional politics of "the margins" or "minorities"', where what was a strategy of resistance and survival becomes a postcolonial longing for 'unrelenting people's war'.⁷⁷ What emerges, then, from this brief discussion is a concept of the *positional hybrid* – positional, both in the sense of charting the shifting positions of what Spivak has called subaltern subject-effects, and in the Gramscian sense of 'a war of position'⁷⁸, which opens up the possibility of discussing the various and multi-accented strategies of resisting and building hegemony.

Indigenous idioms (both elite and marginal), western idioms, signifiers of resistance, cooptation, and domination all mediate a

puzzling existence in the Indian Pop film, hybridizing this art form, and tracing the limits of hybridity itself. I wish to take these categories of interpretation and apply them to two films that were made between 1958 and 1961, *College Girl* and *Bluffmaster*. Attempting to discern the various idioms that speak throughout the films, I hope to show the nuances of the postcolonial Pop films.

⁷⁹ This movie is in black and white. My copy seems to be heavily censored around issues of bad language especially during scenes where there is disrespect being shown to a male authority figure. Also, I have as yet been unable to get the full citation of the film; such information is extremely difficult to come by, given the rather informal records that have been kept about these older films.

*College Girl*⁷⁹ is a film of nationalist 'feminism' that stars Shammī Kapoor as Shyam and Vaijayantimala as Kamala (both stars are light skinned). As far as Pop films go, this is an atypical representation, for the central organizing framework is a certain Nehruvian 'feminism'. The movie opens with a quote by Nehru in English: 'The greatest revolution in a country is the one that affects the status and living conditions of its women'. In fact, the very title and the songs in English point to an imagined audience of elite educated viewers. The cracks in this sutured imaginary begin to show as we chart the anxious gestures within the narrative to situate Kamala and Shyam within (a reconstructed, and thus Modern) Tradition. Still, some of the key features of the hybrid film are also evident. As we shall see, the most obvious western influence in the story is an echo of *King Lear* and, to a lesser degree, *Jane Eyre*, both well known stories in India. Concomitantly, Ram's narrative echoes the distrust of that ancient Hindu king for his wife Sita. Also, the plot is structured through a series of binaries: traditional versus modern, the village versus the town, the treacherous versus the patriotic, and so on. In each case, through the optic of Nehruvian nationalism, one term becomes valorized over the second 'mistaken' term which is ordered under the sign chain 'Superstitious, Oppressive Tradition'.

The role of Elvis-as-singing-rebel (as fetishized signifier), and Krishna-as-playful-boy (within the idiom of *bhakti*) is entwined in the character of Shyam. The first glimpse we get of the Indian Elvis is at a field hockey match, where Shyam is masterfully manoeuvring the ball past all the defenders. As he scores the winning goal, a song begins: 'Hip, hip hooray'. The other players raise him above their heads as he sings in Hindu: 'Stop acting like women: come out of your homes.' The Elvis image seems to be proper in its sphere: in the school, and on the streets, the whisperings of a sexual bravado quietly echo through these scenes. Within the generic structures of this nationalist film, the signifier 'Elvis' was assigned specific signifieds. The Elvis that is invoked is the carefree, flirtatious, 'good ole boy'; the mischievous son who is not too alienated from the home, and a certain (vague) tradition (the Elvis of, say, *Love me Tender* [Robert Webb, 1956] or *GI Blues* [Norman Taurog, 1960]).⁸⁰ The

⁸⁰ Steven and Boris Zmijewsky, *The Films and Career of Elvis Presley* (Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1976), pp. 105-4 and 117-18.

Krishna side surfaces in his amorous (but safe) dealings with Kamala – in the home, and in the village. When Shyam and Kamala first meet in college there is an immediate friction between them: she is the serious student in traditional *shalvar-kameez*, whose uncle is against her pursuing her studies; he, dressed like a disaffected western urban youth, is the amorous joker, talking back to the professor and making a fool out of him. She seems not to like him, but he has left an impression. When they meet again in Shyam's home, the sound of sitars explodes in the background, signifying a romantic union. Shyam assumes the posture of the naughty son, the Govind of Tradition.⁸¹ They then banter back and forth, playfully teasing each other, Kamala almost exposing Shyam's schoolboy antics to Ratan, his Modern, rich, progressive, doctor father; Shyam almost exposing Kamala's deception⁸² to Ram, her Traditional, rich, tyrannical, *ayurvedic* healer uncle.

In fact his 'play' seems always to have been in the service of some greater good: for instance, in an effort to stave off what he thinks is her complete dissolution, Ram decides to get Kamala's marriage arranged in the home village; but he is tricked by Shyam who dresses up as an astrologer and convinces the prospective husband that marriage to Kamala would be bad luck. Here, in the interests of completing the national revolution through the figure of woman, the idiom of *Dharma*, 'dressed up as ancient Hindu wisdom', is invoked. Shyam literally does dress up as 'ancient Hindu wisdom' as the pundit-astrologer through whom the wisdom of the ages speaks. And yet, for Shyam to be presented as a suitable husband for Kamala a certain discipline is needed to differentiate him from Ram's dissolute, drunken sons: hence he is a patriotic Air Force pilot by the end of the movie. Thus, the wisdom which speaks to and for the Nation, speaks through those idioms which, although masquerading as universal, in fact violently divide the nation along class, caste, region, language, and religion. For whispering in the background is the politics of *Swadeshi*, identified with *Dharma*, a politics that had failed just a decade before to reconcile the antagonistic interests of the diverse Indian nation – 'especially the opposing interests of Hindu-Muslim sectarian politics'. 'The more the Hindu middle classes united in nationalism inspired by *Dharma*, the more the exclusive aspects of Hindu *Dharma* divided the nation: ranging the peasantry against the rural gentry, the Namasudras against upper castes, and above all, Muslims and Hindus against each other'.⁸³ A rural identity, refracted through the ideology of *dharmic* apologetics for the urban propertied classes, therefore, could be seen as a signifier of ignorance and oppression, evacuating any subjectivity from the peasantry and obfuscating their exploitation. Shyam, the antiauthoritarian signifier of Elvis,

⁸¹ Govind: the name of the boy-Krishna.

⁸² She has lied to Ram so that she can go to college.

⁸³ Guha, 'Dominance without hegemony', p. 246.

is rearticulated, then, as the modern, the rich, the virtuous, and the patriotic. Yet, rooted in a tradition of Krishna-as-gopi and son-as-dutiful-patriot, this modernization is cathected by the (Hindu) 'Indian'.

Kamala's desire for education is represented as a degrading mimicry (of the westernized, educated woman) by Ram, who refuses to let her pursue her studies. The nationalist appropriation of this mimicry from the very start must be legitimized through Kamala's own patriotic-familial concern (also within the idiom of *bhakti* and *dharma*) to help alleviate the plight of women (in loving memory of her mother who had died in childbirth), even as her very desire for education is an intervention against the phallocentric idiom of *bhakti*. When she flees home to pursue her studies, she is marked by her incomplete identity; this lack will be filled in by the nationalist discourse. Thus, only when her desire is chastened by patriotism is she given voice within this discourse.

Further, a playful appropriation of western signifiers is not as accessible to her, for there is clearly a difference in the two types of 'play' at work here. For Shyam, their bantering means another scolding from his father, which his brusque jocularly can absorb or brush off; for Kamala it means withdrawal from school. The strictures of Indian patriarchy make it necessary that her egoistic aspirations be purified by devotion to something other than herself – in this case the country (it seems unimaginable that Kamala would want education because she lusts after power, authority and money), and then eventually, her 'backward' uncle, whom she helps to enlighten. By the end of the movie Kamala rescues Ram, now a wandering beggar, blinded by his drunken sons, whom he had believed to be more faithful than his wayward niece. Kamala, now a doctor, discovers him in the rain asking for some food. She is aghast, but does not reveal herself to him. She seats him in a rickshaw and pulls him home herself. Kamala operates on his eyes although all the older male doctors have refused to perform the operation for fear of the high risk involved. With the encouragement of Ratan, she is successful in giving Ram back his sight. Seeing the folly of his ways, and finally recognizing Kamala for what she is – a *Saraswati*, the goddess of learning – Ram is reconciled with Ratan, his Modern friend, and gladly blesses Kamala's and Shyam's marriage plans.

The Nation in its war with Tradition violently cathects the figure of Kamala, even as she seemingly emerges into 'personhood'. The localized modes of male domination are seen through this liberal-nationalist optic as 'the survivals of a precapitalist culture are destined to be overcome by the leaders of the nation on their march to progress'.⁸⁴ As Julie Stephens has underscored, those who are given voice by this nationalist

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 214.

⁸⁵ Julie Stephens, 'Feminist fictions: a critique of the category "non-western woman" in feminist writings on India', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI* (Delhi: OUP, 1986), p. 100. I do not, however, mean to claim that this type of 'woman's film' is at all the same or even continuous with that type of feminism that, say, Gail Omvedt, Mudhu Kishwar or Julie Stephens herself, for that matter, represent.

⁸⁶ Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for wonders', p. 171.

⁸⁷ I am drawing on Spivak's essay 'Deconstructing historiography', p. 331 where she writes: 'A functional change in a sign system is a violent event. Even when it is perceived as "gradual", or "failed" or yet "reversing itself", the change itself can only be operated by the force of a crisis.'

discourse are the ones that voice the discourse: that is, the ideological constraints of nationalist feminism repress those subjects or those aspects of subjectivity that lie beyond the parameters of the ideology – or, if not repressed, these aspects are delegitimized as false consciousness.⁸⁵ And yet, by the end, Kamala has resisted her uncle but also been contained within the demands of the men in her life. In fact there is only one point in the movie when Kamala is not being supervised by a male figure and is completely on her own – living alone as a medical student – but then Shyam reenters the narrative as her saviour. Nevertheless, such attempted closure cannot erase or even fully contain the disavowal of authority that both Kamala and Shyam represent. They are signifiers of moments of denial to the discursive closure that patriarchal, nationalist authority demands.⁸⁶ Thus, there is certainly a subversion of traditional authority, even as the figure of the rebellious woman is absorbed into the career of the Revolution. In other words, in resisting the strangulation of patriarchy, the woman's desire for 'liberation' (*the crisis for patriarchy*) is assimilated into the broader project of nation building – the new imagined community – and as such, this desire becomes an expression of patriotism. Just as 'duty for the family–father–husband–God' had become 'duty for the sovereign', so now it becomes 'duty for the New Nation'.

The particular dyad that operates between Kamala and Shyam is initially one of loyal/patriotic educated woman versus the rebellious/wayward son. Gradually, a normalization process takes place whereby the loyal daughter is reenlisted into duty to her father-figure ('so he can see the light'), while the wayward son, having joined the military, has proved in his very choice of profession his faithfulness to the New Nation. These normalization processes help to salve those anxieties which complain of a working woman being *too* autonomous, *too* intelligent, *too* rich and *too* modern; the flippanant son being *too* rebellious, *too* uncontrollable, *too* playful. But this normalization occurs within a narrative that has already been denied and ruptured by the figures of both the Elvis rebel and the westernized woman.

Yet, more than moments of denial, Kamala's story signals a functional change in the sign system of 'the Nation' marked by the crisis of 'the women's question'. The question that needs to be asked is how the ideology of an inverted Orientalism (Indian Nationalism) interpellates the figure of the New Woman. I would argue that this interpellation is an uneven, contested event; this change in the sign system is itself multiply inscribed. Having recently been given the franchise, increasing numbers of women were organizing for education and political representation. Cultural representations were very much embroiled in these

issues, the role of film and the media in education being intensely contested topics. Ten years later, these cultural representations had created a climate in which a woman could become India's third Prime Minister while there was still about 80 per cent female illiteracy. Such contradictions are embedded within *College Girl*.

Equally rife with contradictions, *Bluffmaster* is a paradigmatic hybrid Indian Pop film of the early sixties. Once again Shammi Kapoor, as Ashok Babhu, plays the trickster Elvis-Krishna figure, whose very existence is mimicry: his apartment is seemingly furnished by stage props from an American film: a fake radio, a broken shower, a ragged toy doll. '*Atmosphere bilkul Amrican hai*' (the atmosphere is absolutely American), he says. Set in Bombay, the story begins with Ashok swindling Brylcreem and biscuits from a storekeeper so he can give the biscuits (rearticulated as English cookies) to the neighbour's children, thereby incurring the favour of their mother (which translates into monetary advantage later), and selling the Brylcreem (rearticulated as American body lotion) to a body builder. The western associations stick with him – he is almost always dressed in a T-shirt and slacks.

In fact there are many similarities between the Elvis-Krishna imagery here and in *College Girl*; like Shyam, Ashok is also the amorous scoundrel, singing and smirking his way through various near catastrophes. The love affair is also an initially antagonistic relationship, after which it becomes the pretext for a social commentary (as in the *jatras*). Seema (played by a light-skinned Saira Banu) is the western-educated, rich and spoiled niece of Ashok's employer. Their love affair is marked by the fantasies of the hybridized elite: as Ashok declares his love for Seema, she, in a typically Indian woman's gesture, lowers her eyes while animated cupids appear on each cheek and shoot arrows into her eyes. In the penultimate scene of the romance, Ashok asks Seema, 'Don't you watch English films?' 'Yes', she replies. 'Well what do two people do when they love each other in those films?' She runs into his arms and whispers again and again, 'I love you' – in English.

However, one of the central organizing optics in *Bluffmaster* is a peculiar Gandhian populism, giving the movie the veneer of a *jatra*. This optic redeploys the Elvis figure not as the 'good ole boy' but as the poor and wayward, lascivious son (the Elvis of say, *Wild in the Country* [Philip Dunne, 1961] or *Girls! Girls! Girls!* [Norman Taurog, 1962])⁸⁸ who must be brought back into the fold: Elvis as a sign of depraved modernity. Thus, Ashok, represented as poor and out of money, answers an ad. seeking a

⁸⁸ Zmiejewsky, *Elvis*, pp. 124–6, and 134–35.

Shammi and Madhubala.
Picture courtesy of Ratna.



photographer at a magazine. He steals a camera and then presents himself to the editor as a famous English-educated, foreign-raised photographer. His first photo, coincidentally, is of the corrupt magazine owner's niece, Seema, whom Ashok photographs slapping a man who has insulted her. She is offended by Ashok's audacity, confronts him, and is immediately marked as a forceful woman who will not be dominated. He makes an excuse and flees before he too is assaulted.

Aptly then, it is Jamna, Ashok's mother, who is the agent of this Gandhian critique. Jamna-as-Mother-Tradition is represented as the return of Truth and all that is good in India, for while Ashok is swindling his neighbours and deceiving his girlfriend, back in Ashok's village, Jamna eagerly awaits news from her son. She is a well-respected *thakuri* (wife of the village leader, who is

always upper caste) with her own property (her husband is dead). She is also the safekeeper of the village, holding everyone's valuables until they need them. She is overjoyed to get even a letter from her son, although being illiterate, she can not read Ashok's and has the postman read it for her. Ashok informs her that he has become a reporter, which she interprets to mean that he has some form of Government employment. In her naivete, it should be noted, she is not mocked, but rather valorized as the safekeeper of a deeper Indian (that is, Hindu/Gandhian) Truth. This ideology valorized the village over the evils of industrialization. As Partha Chatterjee notes:

In [Gandhi's] *Hind Swaraj* the critique of modern civilization and the plea for a return to the simple self-sufficiency of 'traditional' village life were based on the idea that it was the very changelessness of Indian civilization, its timeless ahistoricity, which was proof of its truth. India was resistant to change because it was not necessary for it to change; its civilization had found the true principles of social organisation.⁸⁹

The mother-village in the form of Jamna (as avenging *Kali devi*) comes back to chasten Ashok, the wayward son-town, while helping to expropriate the oppressors-deceivers (the Uncle) and appropriating the modern, spoiled woman, Seema, back into the fold of the family along the way. Thus, when Jamna learns of her son's perfidy, she is so outraged that she begins to beat him with a *danda*, saying, 'Your father never told a lie, he was no cheat!', and collapses with a minor heart attack. Seema too, is extremely angry with Ashok, saying, 'You have ruined my life', the implication being that she is socially disgraced by his deception) but out of compassion for the ill, she decides to help Jamna. Ashok has a conversion over the unconscious body of his mother, saying, 'I will only follow the road of Truth from now on'. When he reveals his deceptions to his neighbours they spurn him and throw him out of the building. He wanders the streets alone and penniless.

So to the fantastic final scene, when the neighbours, having learned of Ashok's perfidious ways, and having expelled him from their midst, return to save him from the evil clutches of the villains. This curious faithfulness becomes intelligible when read as a renewed faith in Truth. Seema's gradual submission throughout the movie becomes instead her reenlistment to tread the path of Truth; of course in the footsteps of her new lover-God. Jamna's illiteracy is not a sign of ignorance, but a signifier of deeper wisdom. The dyad city/village serves to move the narrative along, while heightening the tension between other dyads such as foreign/Indian, money/poverty, Truth/deception.

The mimicry of Ashok, therefore, is mocked by the

⁸⁹ Partha Chatterjee, 'Gandhi and the critique of civil society', in Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies III*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 180.

90 Bhabha, 'Signs taken for wonders', p. 166.

authenticity of Jamna. The signs of the West (Elvis, the camera, the suits, the palatial house, the intermittent English, the cupids, the cars) are not taken for wonders but as indicators of disemblance. Yet the western sign in the Indian hybrid movie is still a 'displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition'⁹⁰ of what those images represented in the metropolis. They are moments when both the ideologies of British domination and Nationalist consolidation are thwarted in a resistive valorization of, first, the symbology of America and, then later, of (Indian) Truth.

And yet it is a return to a truth that seemingly gives fullest agency to Ashok as the chastened hybrid, able to balance the wiles of the rebel with a deeper commitment to tradition. As Chatterjee notes:

And so we get within the ideological unity of Gandhism as a whole the conception of a national framework of politics in which the peasants are mobilized but do not participate, of a nation of which they are a part but a national state from which they are forever distanced.⁹¹

91 Chatterjee, 'Gandhi', p. 194.

This distancing is marked by the return to Truth embodied by Ashok. This return incorporates many of the same idioms of *Dharma* that *College Girl* employed. Yet what had been *dharmic* for the New Nation, is *adharma* for the New Truth: modernity is mocked, as the *tanga* (horse carriage) outpaces the car; wealth becomes suspect, as evil's riches cannot buy off Ashok's love; the independent, educated woman is assimilated back into the Family, as Seema's feisty intransigence is tattered with the arrows of cupid's love. What emerges is Ashok, in command and triumphant, the rebel with a cause, the Elvis-Krishna figure whose rebellion can now be directed towards the service of Tradition. As Richard Fox has remarked, 'Thus, the new India of Gandhism socialism is from the outset the old India of Hindu identity, and both of them are the Indian cultural beliefs constituted within the unequal world system'.⁹² And the unequal Indian system. For Seema, herself the hybrid westernized city woman, this return of Tradition at once marks the limits of her own privilege and her resistance: the mistress of numerous faceless, nameless, dark-skinned servants is now the servant of the Truth. As Spivak has commented:

92 Fox, 'Gandhian Socialism and Hindu Nationalism', p. 249.

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'Third World Woman' caught between tradition and modernization.⁹³

93 Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', p. 306.

Seema's mimicry of the flamenco dance is possible only within the confines of Ashok's plan of revenge: thus, the images of the

94 What remains lacking in my analysis is a clear understanding of the motif of cross dressing. Further research needs to be done on this, and the traditions of the *hijiras* as transvestite-gypsies (often employed for entertainment value at marriages in various parts of India) need to be explored.

Spanish gypsy's lurid sexuality can be appropriated by the hybrid woman as long as it is all just a *bluff*, only if she can then be disappeared into the nothingness of Tradition.⁹⁴ And still, in one sense, her very presence as mimic-hybrid disrupts any notions of Tradition and male self-possession: hers is the narrative that splits apart the continuity of the Return to Truth.

What then is the 'truth' behind the hybrid film? What *does* Elvis mean? What is pernicious about these images and what liberatory? Both the movies I have dealt with employ the symbology of Elvis, mixed with certain idioms of *bhakti* and *Dharma*, refracted through a Nehruvian Nationalism and/or a Gandhian Populism. Thus the signifier Elvis-Krishna needs to be chastened in both versions: one through a patriotic service to the Modern Revolution (although still in the form of the Father); the other through a renewed commitment to one's duty to the Mother(land)-Village. The appropriation of this symbology is at once a resistance to the repressive strategies of the State, and a reinscription by these very same forces. For women, lower castes or the poor, this refracted symbology marks the limits of their ability to appropriate signs for resistance. A whole different set of anxieties of sexuality, exploitation and domination cathect these figures in Indian film, marking, as I implied earlier, the *positional* differences between Seema's or Kamala's hybridity in relation to the Indian Elvis. Thus, mimicry and hybridity also mark these figures, but their signifying practices indicate constraints that accent their domination within Indian society. And yet they survive. The subject of this counter-narrative has been both the Empire and those who strike back; both the seeming mimic and the avowed authentic. As the initial gesture of a genealogy of Elvis, Krishna and the Indian hybrid, I have attempted to chart a resistance that is historically, but not deterministically attuned.

Today, images of Elvis have been replaced by images of Rambo, the Terminator, Robo-Cop and, yes, even Madonna – continuing a tradition of hybridity, or *masala*, that has been part and parcel of the (post)colonial experience. But the changes signify changes within the Indian polity itself: as fractious 'self-determination' movements confront, subvert and wage war on the proponents of the One True *Hindutva* (Hindu Nation), as material resources gravitate towards a shrinking upper-caste, Hindu elite, and as multinationals set up cancerous free-trade zones, hybridity increasingly becomes the stuff of postcoloniality even as a National Hinduism is violently consolidated. What I have tried to show is that, within its historical specificity, such images are disarticulated and redeployed for a number of

opposing strategies for domination and resistances, both by those who have the resources and those who are attempting to appropriate them. For the truth is, in India, Elvis did play Bombay – despite the moralistic ravings of the government – and it was the *filmwallahs* who played him again and again.

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Cooperation and compromise: coproduction and public service broadcasting

JULIE LIGHT

Anyone who makes a habit of reading television trade journals cannot remain ignorant of the level of coproduction activity amongst television broadcasters and production companies. Although it is apparent that this activity is an internationally accepted and entrenched means of production funding, there has been little attention paid by observers and theorists of broadcasting to the implications of this form of international cooperation. The following account is based on a survey amongst television programme-makers in 1992, focusing on two BBC television production departments and designed to uncover some of coproduction's consequences.¹ The results of the enquiry are presented here not so much for the answers provided as for the questions raised about the dilemmas for public service broadcasters in the 1990s, particularly in terms of issues of editorial accountability, freedom from vested interest and the slippery notion of national identity within a national television service.

Before setting out the detail of the study, the incidence of coproduction must be set in its context. All my interviewees were asked why they participated in coproduction and the answer

¹ The research took the form of semi-structured interviews with fifteen people working in Music and Arts and Science and Features Departments in BBC Television during a two week period in July 1992. All quotations in this paper not otherwise attributed are drawn from these interviews. The interviewees consisted mainly of executive producers, but included also heads of department, unit managers, producers and coproductions executives.

2 *Television Week Edinburgh*
International Television Festival
Magazine (London: EMAP, 1991),
p. 61.

invariably came back that it was due to financial pressures. This response has to be set against the background of the world-wide squeeze in funding of public service broadcasters. In Britain, the BBC's income from the licence fee has been pegged to the Retail Price Index, which traditionally runs several points behind increases in broadcasting costs. Similarly European and US public service stations have suffered reductions in real income. The result is that few have the money available to make high cost programming, such as that which contains a large foreign filming element or expensive actors or contributors. Coproduction has been a way to continue making these types of programmes without the major outlay it would involve for a single production house. As *Television Week's* special Edinburgh Television Festival issue noted in 1991:

[The] co-production market is indeed booming. What has happened is that the clumsy buoyancy of the early days has been replaced by a quiet, studious and slightly dour professionalism. Things are happening but those in the know have no wish to brag about this essentially masochistic pastime dictated by a cash-strapped market rather than creative priorities. There is no way around the postulate that co-production is a poor man's choice.²

Faced with a limited income and the need to fill the same number of programme hours, if not more, the choice has in many cases boiled down to either limiting output or finding money from elsewhere. As limiting output is not an option that the BBC has found attractive when the British commercial channels have been expanding theirs, departments have been encouraged to find as much outside funding as possible. With sponsorship and advertising prohibited by the BBC's Charter of Incorporation (and not necessarily attractive options anyway), the easiest alternative has been to enter into joint ventures – coproductions – with bodies outside the BBC, often broadcasters of other nationalities.

The term coproduction needs some explanation. There is a spectrum of deals which spreads from pre-sale on the one hand to a fully shared partnership in production on the other, and the boundaries from one category to the next are not particularly clear. One of the most difficult distinctions, partly because of the different usage by various agencies, is that between coproduction and cofinance. There have been a number of definitions offered which act as a useful framework in this area:

A co-production is an arrangement where the partners, as well as sharing the costs, co-operate in the development of an idea for a programme or series of programmes, and then the

3 A. Pragnell, *Television in Europe: Quality and Value in a Time of Change* (Manchester: European Institute for the Media, 1985), p. 53.

4 *A Guide to BBC Co-Productions* (London: BBC, 1991), p. 1.

production through the provision of directing or technical staff or other facilities. . . . A co-financing deal is one where there is a partner who initiates and undertakes the production but who looks to others to share the costs either by making an investment in it . . . or by agreeing in advance to buy the programme.³

This distinction is theoretically a useful one, as it illuminates creative control as the distinguishing factor in an essentially financial arrangement. However, during this research the term coproduction was used in the way that it is used within the BBC:

A co-production is a collaboration between two or more parties in which the parties invest value in order to achieve a common goal: the production of a mutually acceptable quality and content. A co-production is a production in which the collaborating parties have a continuing interest for the copyright life of the production. This interest is usually expressed in terms of the rights which each party holds.⁴

From the interviews, it emerged quite clearly that programme-makers considered that there was no such thing as a typical coproduction. A considerable number were of the opinion that there once had been a norm, but that now the breadth of arrangements and contracts defied any sort of reasonable standardization. A phrase frequently used to describe the old pattern was 'take the money and run'. This position was one in which the BBC made a coproduction deal, and then made the programme exactly as it would have done if there had been no coproduction partner, its only concession to the coproducer being the surrender of the transmission rights to a particular territory. This is what was most commonly considered to be coproduction in BBC terms in the early and mid-1980s in the features areas.

However, at the time of this research considerable changes had taken place. Although to some extent this straight sort of cofinance deal still existed, in general there were many more coproductions that involved a variety of negotiation far beyond the surrender of territorial transmission rights. On the one hand, the whole issue of rights had evolved and become more complex and wide-ranging, and on the other hand, it was most frequently the case that the BBC production team were no longer able to make the programme without taking into consideration the needs and demands of the coproducer in creative terms.

Illustrating this change, practically speaking, was one production comprising members of BBC staff alongside the staff from the main coproducer, all operating as an integrated team. The series in production was thus served by two executive producers, one from each of the main coproducing partners, a number of

producers drawn from three broadcasting companies, and support staff especially recruited by the BBC and main coproducer for the purposes of that particular production. They were all accommodated in BBC premises and generally used BBC facilities. This formed a very different picture to the older style cofinance arrangement. Similarly, another coproduction in progress was one in which the BBC input formed that of the minority partner, thus classified as a 'reverse' coproduction. It nonetheless involved an executive producer and two producers employed by the BBC, clearly defining it as a 'genuine' coproduction rather than a financial transaction. As for the 'rights' themselves, present coproduction deals were in no way limited to transmission arrangements. The coproduction contracts for these two and many other deals tended to make reference also to video, record and book rights or any combination of these, with different arrangements and stipulations. Again, it appeared to the people interviewed in my survey that these considerations made it virtually impossible to group together a number of deals as in any way illustrating a typical pattern.

Another way in which coproductions could be clearly differentiated from each other was in terms of the type of partner involved. Even within these two production departments, and examining contracts relating to programmes in production in 1991 and 1992 only, there were deals involving foreign broadcasters, distributors, record companies, arts foundations, British independent production companies, another British broadcaster, and foreign independent production companies – singly or in combination, either 'normal' or 'reverse'. Each coproducer type would have a different agenda which would affect the nature of the deal.

It is worth noting which programmes were deemed suitable for coproduction in the first place. Science producers felt that in some ways science subject matter was good for the attraction and successful completion of coproduction. Science, it was felt by the programme-makers interviewed, dealt with information that was relatively universal between nations and therefore required little compromise between international coproduction partners. Said one, 'Well, once you've cut open somebody's chest and you see a beating heart . . . it really doesn't matter in which country you cut the chest open'. Similarly, another cited the filming of a foetus in the womb as a universal image. Also in favour of science as a suitable area for coproduction it was explained that since so much of the research happens in the USA, it was relatively unproblematic to seek or accept US partners who would wish to see US research represented in the finished programme.

On the negative side, science was felt to have some particular difficulties to overcome in coproduction terms. The first of these

was that science programming for a lay audience tended to take a considerable amount of verbal explanation, thus causing potential problems when coproducing with a partner using a language other than English, and still some terminological difficulties when dealing with North American or Australian English. The second problem was where the subject matter was not 'pure' science but was culturally or socially driven. In these cases international coproduction was seen as potentially very difficult, requiring extended explanation of the circumstances of each country's society and culture in order to make the final product comprehensible to each partner's audience. This problem had cropped up constantly for a medical series which involved four coproducers from different countries. Finally, one producer expressed the belief that it was hard enough to make science programmes interesting for a general audience at the best of times, and that any compromises initiated by the coproducer could only make this task more difficult to achieve.

In music and arts programming there was the view that performance events were good subjects for coproduction ventures. This was attributed to the universality of music and dance in that they needed no verbal accompaniment, and in the case of opera, it was felt that it was internationally accepted that translation from the original language might be necessary. However, much of the output of the department was of a documentary format and therefore did not benefit from this absence of the spoken word. Like the science producers, music and arts producers felt that the higher the specific cultural content of a programme, the more unsuitable it would be for coproduction. This tended also to mean that the less performance included in the programme, the less likely that it would be suitable for coproductions.

Thus notions of programme types well suited to coproduction were centred around notions of universality and difference. Where a subject or event was deemed to be culturally universal, producers were happy to consider it as coproducible. As soon as elements of national or cultural difference appeared, the subject was deemed less suitable. Language difference was a major concern and therefore types of programmes demanding a high level of speech in any context were less suitable than those which could convey information through 'universal' images.

In terms of specific programme content there were certain matters of style that were affected by whether or not a programme was being coproduced. Generally speaking, it was thought inadvisable to have presenters appearing on filmed reports in the middle of programmes as this would make it difficult to edit out if the coproducer did not like the presenter. Quirky presenters or presenters with strongly national characteristics were also avoided in most cases for the same

reason, unless total agreement between the partners was arrived at early in the production process. Having English speakers talking direct to camera was something to be avoided where partners were not English-speaking themselves as this would necessitate subtitling or dubbing and, as suggested previously, matters particular to one nation or culture were often felt to best be avoided, including local detail or acronyms. In the medical series, for example, this meant steering clear of any references to 'the NHS' or 'Medicare'. Programmes where this policy of avoidance was not possible or not appropriate were often felt to be unsuitable for coproduction in the first place.

Often, as an unwritten rule of international coproduction, there would be the intention of shooting a balanced amount of material in the countries of each of the partners. This obviously provided certain pressures on content that would not be present in a solely BBC production. It also relates back to the science producers' willingness to consider US partners in the face of the amount of research in the USA; in these circumstances it would not be troublesome to include a reasonable amount of footage from the USA. However, one executive producer involved in a coproduction with a Spanish broadcaster noted that in their rough cuts there were not as many Spanish sequences as the Spanish partner would have liked 'even though we tried hard to get sequences in Spain'. Thus, producers would make every effort to comply with this expectation but might not ultimately include the requisite balance of nationalities.

It does not take a huge leap in imagination to see that editorial control may be affected by the fact of coproduction. The BBC, nevertheless, has stringent regulations and guidelines built into its constitution. The BBC Charter stipulates that the BBC must retain complete editorial control over what it produces and what appears on BBC channels:

The Corporation shall not without the prior approval of the Secretary of State receive money or any valuable consideration from any person in respect of the sending or emitting, or the refraining of sending or emitting, of any matter whatsoever by means of the stations or any of them.⁵

To avoid these considerations being ignored in a coproduction there are explicit notes that accompany every coproduction agreement (other than 'reverse' coproductions in which the wording is slightly amended) which state:

The artistic and editorial control of the original version of the programme/s will be vested in the BBC and the BBC will give good faith consideration to production suggestions by the coproducer on content interpretation and presentation.

⁵ *BBC Annual Report and Accounts*, (London: BBC, 1990/1), p. 107.

Certain of the contracts, when dealing with coproducers who commonly make sponsorship deals, also contain a clause relating to the BBC's position on sponsored programmes. It is drawn indirectly from what appears in the BBC's Charter and states that the parties to the agreement must acknowledge that the BBC is absolutely prohibited from broadcasting a programme which contains any matter which is provided at the expense of a sponsor and could lead the audience to believe that the BBC's independence had been affected.

This is, of course, entirely in line with BBC responsibilities as a public service broadcaster. The second clause does, however, leave a loop-hole with respect to the activities of a coproducer, in that a programme may actually include funding by sponsorship as long as the perception of this is not passed on to the audience. This presents no difficulty where the BBC's editorial control is complete and the logic with respect to the Charter is therefore without fault. However, in practice difficulties do appear.

In order to examine the mechanisms of editorial control and how these difficulties manifest themselves, it is easiest to look at a number of individual coproductions as examples. The first is a series of eight programmes about medicine being made as a coproduction between four partners, all broadcasters from different nations, with the BBC and a US PBS station as the two main partners. Staffing arrangements include an executive producer and producers from each of the major partners. One programme was being made under the auspices of one of the minority partners but final editing as well as some ongoing editorial supervision was to be done from the main production site. Editorial control was to rest with both the major partners. The contract stipulated that the Programme should be developed jointly and the editorial control should be vested jointly in the coproducer's series producer on behalf of the coproducer, and BBC series producer on behalf of the BBC.

Already it can be seen that the BBC has departed from the principle of complete editorial control over its output, as it is contractually sharing with another broadcasting organization, albeit that the result must nonetheless satisfy the BBC's representatives and that the final product for BBC transmission can be altered or reshot to suit the BBC. This situation is unusual in that the control and responsibility for the programme is so evenly split. 'This is a really equal partnership in production in one location, which is what's unusual' said one of the executive producers. Editorial decisions are made by thorough discussion and the striving towards a shared vision of how the programme ought to be and what it should cover.

The contract also specified that neither party nor the series

producers shall afford any rights of consultation or editorial control to a third party such that the programme could be deemed to be a sponsored programme. In practice, it came across that the two executive producers had to hold onto editorial control against considerable pressure from sources outside the partnership. Some of these were no threat in terms of perceived sponsorship, but nevertheless put additional stress on the idea of the BBC's right of sole editorial control. Money raised by the coproducer for the series had come from a number of sources, some of whom demanded rights of consultation although not control. A large advisory panel of experts and academics had been appointed to keep an eye on the project for some of the US funding contributors, and from the very initial stages of development the project had been subject to the scrutiny of those who were likely to help finance it. From the very start the treatment had been under pressure for approval from sources outside the BBC. Said the executive producer for the coproducer:

Programming not only depends on the vicissitudes of charity and funding but there also is a de facto form of censorship by virtue of the fact that you have to develop projects that are going to appeal to the funding entities.

The BBC executive producer was also concerned about the change in the US law that previously had forbidden the funding or sponsorship of programmes by companies involved in the line of business covered by the programme itself. The coproducer was currently seeking to find additional funds by approaching drug companies, who would clearly have a vested interest in the content of a series taking a critical view of medical practices around the world. He explained that in the promotional film using extracts of the programmes, mention of drug companies had been consciously omitted in order to maximize the potential for raising money. Both executive producers stressed that although these types of funders did not have editorial control of any kind, the pressure was always there to tailor the production to ensure that it received sufficient funding for completion. This programme was thus only a small step away from receiving a type of 'sponsorship' investment and being opened to acute pressures as a result of being coproduced with a US partner:

The integrity of what a producer is going to do is threatened just like in America. Our need to go out to corporations for support and different foundations for support all erodes, after a period of time, the way you think about the project you have, because you can't get away from tailoring it to appeal to the various audiences for your proposal or treatment . . . and that is also threatened by the coproduction situation. You're going

to inevitably, invariably tailor it to what you think people want to hear. . . . You've made a huge investment and you want the money, you want to do the project.

Nonetheless, there are pressures that the BBC is supposed to be free from by virtue of the licence fee. And the pressure continues well beyond the initial proposal stage. Talking of another programme which involved corporate funding, one of the executive producers said 'It's all very well talking about no editorial control, but they just withdraw the money'. With this series, then, there is a sacrifice of full editorial control on the part of the BBC and through the coproducer comes a series of intense financial pressures to produce a programme which is satisfactory to funding bodies who may have a vested interest in the contents of the programme.

Another example of compromise is illustrated by an eight-programme series about genetics. It is a reverse coproduction with another US PBS station. The idea for the series originated with the coproducer, and most of the team working on the project are in one way or another hired by the coproducer. However, the BBC provides accommodation and some facilities as well as an executive producer and two producers.

Under the terms and conditions of the agreement for reverse coproductions, the BBC has editorial control over what is shown in its territory and the coproducer maintains rights of editorial control in other territories. During the production of the programme, control, practically speaking, was entirely vested in the coproducer. This left the BBC executive producer editorial control only by persuasion.

I find it unsatisfactory . . . mainly because the BBC doesn't have editorial control but yet, of course, I'm still expected to bring in a series which is satisfactory to the BBC. It's very difficult to do that when you don't have editorial control. . . . There's no point going into this thinking that what you will get is what you would get if the BBC made it.

However, in editorial terms what would seem to matter ultimately is not whether the end result is exactly what the BBC would have made alone, but whether it is material which satisfies the BBC. The BBC does have the right to edit for its own transmission, but faces the possibility of having material which is, in its view, so unsuitable that elements of reshooting have to take place: 'When you get it back here you can change it, but you can't turn a sow's ear into a silk purse'.

This arrangement seems to involve a high level of compromise on the declared brief of the Charter. In addition, the programme

has received funding, via the coproducer, from a pharmaceutical company, thus potentially causing the types of editorial pressures described above for the medical series. This is the price that the BBC pays because the coproducer is providing somewhere between three-quarters and four-fifths of the budget.

A final example of compromise is given by a music and arts strand which has been running for many years and which has gradually seen an increase in the necessity of using coproduction money for many programmes in each series. The executive producer admitted that when approached with an indifferent programme idea backed by lots of money 'it makes it more attractive than the idea possibly merits', although the programme would finally be accepted or rejected on its creative value.

Coproductions in this area were by no means always with other broadcasters, and instead might be with distributors or record companies. The executive producer explained the potential effects if these became regular relationships:

If you have a regular relationship with a coproducer, more and more they are wanting to have some sort of say in the editorial control for their money, and they start to get very miffed if you don't take any of their stuff.

Again, it has become the executive producer's job to hold out against a strong financial pressure to share editorial control.

The issue of 'dirty money' has also raised itself in this programme area. To highlight the dilemma, the executive producer gave an example from several years previously. It was discovered very late in the day that a freelance producer had raised a considerable portion of money for a film about the culture of trucking from lorry companies, and because of this the film's transmission was cancelled. The executive producer drew a parallel between this and much of the coproduction which went unquestioned currently: 'I couldn't for the life of me see what was different between that and something that we do a lot . . . which is, say, a film about a rock band or music which we coproduce with a record company'.

The editorial pressures from the coproducers in this area increasingly result in the practice of creating different versions. This is also a question of content and control. The executive producer expressed the opinion that it was better to have a BBC version with which he was entirely happy and a second version with which the coproducer was satisfied, rather than a single version which pleased nobody.

It's getting as common as muck to surrender editorial control outside the country. . . . It didn't use to bother me but it's starting to more. The coproducer has a different version. We

did a thing shown nine times [in the USA], one of the most successful things they've ever had, but you wouldn't have known it was the BBC if you were watching it in America.

So, in the light of the situation that exists with respect to editorial content, a deeper analysis of the BBC's current position as a public service broadcaster seems necessary. Although coproduction only a forms a part of the television output, it nonetheless represents a pressure point where the issues relating to public service broadcasting are brought to the fore.

One of the central issues of public service which is affected by coproduction is that of national broadcasting and national identity. Coproduction was seen as inserting an additional layer into a programme's relationship with a national audience. All those interviewed for this research were of one mind as to whether international coproduction was an advantage with respect to bringing a richer cultural content to a nation's programming – it was not. In each case the producer would have preferred to make a programme with an international flavour by seeking out appropriate experts and advisors rather than funding or production partners. The problems of producing for different national audiences were found to be considerable: 'Every nation's television is very particular to their own taste which is why we always have such trouble.' To some extent this is a question of production values which vary from nation to nation. Nossiter addresses this in his article 'British television: a mixed economy': 'Some of the lighting levels intentionally used in Britain would be regarded as intolerable, even unprofessional in the US and Canada'.⁶

6 T.J. Nossiter, 'British television: A mixed economy' in J. Blumler, and T.J. Nossiter, (eds), *Broadcasting Finance in Transition* (Oxford: OUP, 1991).

However, it is not simply the production values that vary. One interviewee gave an example of a necessary difference in tone that resulted in Anglo-American endeavour: 'We British find it very easy to half joke about something which is serious. The Americans can't do that – if it's heavy, it's heavy'. Another described a difficulty known in his field as the 'french fry factor'. This phrase derived from a coproduction where a sequence was necessary to illustrate the nutritional value of popular foods. It had been decided that a child eating chips would be a suitably universal figure for all the countries involved, but a debate ensued as to what kind of chips the child should eat and in what wrapping they should appear. Although a small point of deal, this problem had since come to symbolize the difficulty of coproducing a programme which was to be seen as belonging naturally to the national output of each broadcaster.

The fact of coping with the 'french fry factor' was seen as potentially blurring the national and cultural divisions between different television services: 'There's a danger that we're all going

to be producing homogenized programming that attempts to appeal to and relate to everybody. And that's a formula for disaster.' And: 'If it's taken too far, [coproduction] could threaten cultural distinctiveness rather than [promote] richness or diversity.'

Overall content may also be quite dramatically affected due to perceived national sensibilities. The medical series mentioned earlier nearly had to drop what was considered an important story about the 'abortion' pill because the US partners felt that the subject was too sensitive not to throw the series into deep controversy in the USA. Similarly the genetics series had difficulties in dealing with the genetic engineering of animals in such a way that would satisfy all the potential viewers, because the potential viewers in the different countries were seen as having different sensibilities. Although these matters are usually resolved to the satisfaction of all partners, the question remains as to what the effects may be on constructions of national identity.

Finally, I think it is necessary to spare a few thoughts for the influence of coproduction on programme quality. Some of the factors often mentioned in relation to the production of high-class programming are identified by Nossiter from his interviews with British programme-makers. These are: clarity of objective, innovation, and relevance to the human condition.⁷ Coproduction runs the risk of falling down on the first two of these. An interviewee from Nossiter's study said: 'In part because it was a coproduction, there had never been any clear idea of what it was about.'⁸ Certainly, the different objectives of the various partners is bound to threaten clarity of vision as to the direction that the programme should take:

'Innovation' is sufficiently recognised as public service objective to appear in the brief of Channel 4. However, it is over innovation as a prerequisite of quality television that coproduction provides the biggest threat to quality. Many of the producers interviewed in this research were concerned that the coproductions on which they worked stifled opportunities for experimentation:

It doesn't try to do challenging programming that might offend certain people or rock the boat. It's going to do the kind of programming that's going to just mindlessly entertain.

And:

'It's being done more conventionally than we'd have done it ourselves'.

And:

In the US a proper documentary is an event. Here with ten a week we are much more prone to saying 'What's the

⁷ Ibid., pp. 118–19.

⁸ Ibid., p. 118.

innovatory style?', more apt to be experimental. [Coproduction does] not usually involve pushing out the boat and experimenting with new styles.

Thus it seems less likely in this respect that 'quality television' could be maintained in a service dominated by coproduced programming.

To sum up, in terms of editorial control, the construction of national identity and quality, coproduced programmes seem likely to show different characteristics from programmes made by a single production organization. This study only addressed programme-making in two departments of one organization, but nonetheless in the BBC's position as a public service broadcaster, the apparent effects of coproduction come across as less than reassuring. The threat of the infiltration of vested interests is held off only by the principles of the staff making the programmes, who will admit that in certain circumstances they will be pressured into adapting their ideas to fit the coproduction market. Whilst this may not currently allow the frequent or marked manipulation of broadcast material by outside forces, the greater the constraints on programme funding and the more coproduction is relied upon to cover budget shortfalls, the greater the possibility that unacknowledged sponsorship might become a commonplace hazard. Then there is the suggestion that coproduction threatens the maintenance of programme quality by stifling innovation and clarity of objective. These factors may also be compounded by the tendency to tailor ideas to an international coproduction market with a taste for programmes with heritage themes, encouraging stereotypes to be fed to both domestic and foreign markets.

These issues should at least be considered before they become firmly institutionalized. However, it must not be forgotten that for the BBC and for other public service broadcasters, coproduction is principally just a response to insufficient funding from other sources, and that any real solutions to the problems that coproduction raises can only be found by tackling the whole matter of the value and the funding of public service broadcasting.

On/Scenities: Looking at Pornography, National Film Theatre, London, 3 July 1993

While buying my lunchtime sandwich in the middle of the BFI's one-day conference *On/Scenities: Looking at Pornography I* overheard one NFT employee asking if today was the pornography conference, only to be told that it was about censorship. Given that the conference was resolutely intended not to be about censorship but was rather, as Linda Williams put it in her opening remarks, an attempt to place the discussion of pornography 'on-scene', this exchange may suggest how thoroughly imbricated the two debates are. This impression was borne out by the way the final discussion period of the day revolved around issues of censorship, and in particular the negotiations and compromises involved in the staging, or as one delegate referred to it, the 'ob/scene' of the conference itself.

The other thing that struck me about my eavesdropping was the difficulty surrounding the idea of 'looking at pornography', a difficulty which in its legal forms led to this conference being closed and attended by invitation only. At the outset Linda Williams, currently a BFI research scholar, spoke of her regret about the way in which the retreat which the conference represented from her initial suggestion to stage a series of pornographic films at the NFT (titled 'I don't know what it is, but I know it when I see it') had led to a recreation of the nineteenth-century 'secret museum' for the viewing of dangerous material: an impression enhanced by the red plush interior and dramatic lighting of NFT 2.

However, instead of whispered warnings and the thrill of the forbidden, delegates

were greeted to a range of provocative and rigorous presentations. In lieu of Williams' series of films the conference served to launch the BFI's collection of anti-censorship essays on pornography.¹ As the presentations from both Williams and Anne McClintock did not differ much from their written texts in the collection much of the interest to delegates lay in the choice of illustrative material shown at the conference.

Williams chose examples of Annie Sprinkle's work both as porn star and director and from her later incarnation as performance artist to demonstrate how her performances deconstruct the pornography/legitimate art dichotomy, not through opposition but through the transformation effected by parody and pastiche. Sprinkle is a fashionable subject at the moment, with two essays on her work in *Dirty Looks* and a further one in the current *New Formations*.² Williams gave an account of a recent debate between herself and Chuck Kleinhans as to the exact nature of Annie's eponymous sprinkle – ejaculate or urine. This disagreement may, as Williams claims, testify to the 'ontological impossibility' of female sexuality. It does raise a question of legal possibilities, as golden showers are prohibited in videos in Britain, but for me it tickled the sense of the ridiculous never lurking far away from these occasions.

Hilarity surfaced again during Anne McClintock's presentation. She combined a sophisticated analysis of the operations of power within S/M practices with a laudable, if not wholly integrated, plea for the rights and protection of sex-workers. In illustration she showed clips from a gripping slave video, *Situation Vacant*, which detailed the humiliations doled out to a middle-aged man applying for a post in an office run by three rubber-clad dominas. With its absence of explicit sexual content and nods towards realism the film could be read as a study of menopausal

anxiety, backlash against women in the workplace or a fable of unemployment. As a non-metropolitan visitor I was particularly entertained by its central premise that its protagonist was prepared to experience total debasement rather than be sent back to Manchester. In any case its shaky sets, abysmal acting and bizarre dialogue ('you've brought me the wrong sandwiches again you stupid man') reduced most of the audience to helpless laughter.

Perhaps anxious that this response would not do much for the fantasy investment of the audience member who had loaned her the tape, McClintock remonstrated that she had not shown it as an occasion for laughter, although she did profess herself both amused by it and fascinated by the question of the laughter such productions provoke. Her story of a domina forced to leave a client as she was overcome by laughter seemed to raise the possibility of a female laughter which is both transgressive and capable of subversion – the very qualities which McClintock is concerned to locate in S/M pornography. Any woman who has worked with other women for a male boss will recognize the laughter which ends *Situation Vacant* as the three women toast the next applicant for the job: laughter which Bakhtin describes as at once mocking and triumphant: 'it asserts and denies, it buries and revives'.³ Given that both Williams and McClintock acknowledge pornography's limitations insofar as it is only capable of subversion and effect in the realm of sexuality and not those of labour or economic relationships, perhaps we should be looking to other genres as the agents of this change.

The atmosphere of the conference lightened palpably in the afternoon session with the showing of Claire Beavan's and Mandy Merck's entertaining and well-made documentary on lesbian and gay porn, *Every Conceivable Position*⁴ and Richard Dyer's highly performative user's guide to

gay male porn. Two related ideas arose during this session: Mandy Merck spoke about Nayland Blake's recent contention that 'gay sexuality has come to represent sexuality, period . . . right now heterosexual sex is not legible as sex, so gay sex has started to take over that function'⁴; and in the final discussion Lynne Segal suggested that, as responses at the conference had indicated, it is not so much pornography that is a problem as heterosexuality. In other words heterosexual sex is now overwhelmingly read in terms of power and not pleasure.

Although the conference produced at least one unlikely alliance in the agreement of James Ferman, chairman of the British Board of Film Censors, with radical lesbian photographer Della Grace on the essentially non-liberating role of the domina, on the whole the necessarily brief discussion period did not seem to depart far from the orthodoxies of anti-censorship. More aggravatingly, several speakers seized the opportunity to attack the views of pro-censorship feminists who were notable by their absence from this debate. As their views seem to have achieved more currency in the popular domain, the challenge for anti-censorship feminists is perhaps to try and carry their arguments more forcefully outwith the closed doors of the NFT, as the publication of *Dirty Looks* may well do.

The most tantalizing and suggestive issues of the conference seemed to be power and parody, the problematics of heterosexuality, and the appropriation of gay sexuality. It may be the time to ask whether pornography is the most fruitful arena in which to approach these questions.

Jane Sillars

1 Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (eds), *Dirty Looks: Essays on Pornography* (London: BFI, 1993).

2 Anna Douglas, 'Annie Sprinkle: post post porn modernist', *New Formations* no. 19 (1993), pp. 95–108.

3 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and the History of Laughter* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1963).

4 John Gange and Stephen Johnstone, "'Believe me, everybody has something pierced in California': an interview with Nayland Blake", *New Formations* no. 19 (1993), pp. 51–68.

The XVth International IAMHIST Conference, Film And The First World War, Amsterdam, 5–11 July 1993

The XVth International IAMHIST Conference, *Film And The First World War*, set out to bring together scholars from different disciplines, to present a survey of the field, and to discuss different points of view in the writing of European cinema history. The conference was designed initially to combine the project of the Domitor group, (the reexamination of 'traditional' film history) with IAMHIST (International Association of Media Historians) work on film propaganda between the years 1896–1920. As explained in the conference catalogue, the Amsterdam based Film Research Group (*Stichting Film en Wetenschap*, or SFW) then decided that this was too broad an area, and the conference proposal was narrowed down to focus on World War I. This subject drew the interest of scholars from areas outside those circumscribed by Domitor and IAMHIST, which broadened the scope of the conference but at the same time led to an atmosphere of creative anxiety.

This tension was evident at the outset. In his welcome address the Chairman of the IAMHIST Amsterdam 1993 Foundation, Piet de Rooij, noted how World War I battlefields had become tourist attractions and suggested that while 'we know what happened, we don't yet understand'. He called for work to find the real meaning of the event; meaning which would not be 'obscured by discourses of postmodernism and deconstruction'. A somewhat surprising

statement given that William Uricchio had argued in an article ('Coming soon . . .') written for the conference programme that the past has bound together disparate movements ranging from new historicism to the postmodern (as well as such generative discourses as poststructuralism) fueling the interrogation of established value systems, taste hierarchies, and notions of textuality and the viewer. In his call for methodologies that are 'theoretically challenging' and 'more critically self-conscious' Uricchio cited the interdisciplinarity of film and television studies, women's studies and cultural studies as the way forward. The stage was set for some debate around authenticity; indeed, the question of 'fakes' was a central theme in the conference, surfacing in the daily plenary sessions as well as in the diversity of papers and presentations.

The main conference was preceded by a panel entitled 'Love Stories in Fiction Films from France and Germany, 1911–1918'. The screening programme, held at the Netherlands Filmmuseum, interspersed documentary material from the museum's archive with films of love stories made before and during the war. The approaches of the four panelists ranged from textual analysis and theories of spectatorship to audience research. Marianne Lewinsky, for example, made connections between the German audiences for films such as *Heidenroschen* (Frans Hofer, 1916) and the largely female audience for novels with similar narrative characteristics. She argued that formally the film emphasizes visual style and music rather than cause and effect, raising questions about intertextuality across media as well as the multiplicity of possible readings around gender and national identity. The choice of films on the second day of this panel made it possible to discuss the impact of the war on films made during that period, which were not explicitly about the war.

The conference began in earnest the following day and was structured around three strands: National Experience and Trans-National Trade, Uses of Cinema in Wartime, and Framing the Great War. Each day was introduced by a keynote speaker and ended with a wrapping-up session in which brief comments were made about each paper by the chairs, and questions were taken from the floor. There were also special sections on The War on Television and Work in Progress. The international makeup of the presentations provided the opportunity for diverse methods to be compared and discussed, which was one of the stated goals of the conference but also presented problems of language and in the use of visual material. The end-of-day plenaries were useful in that there was a chance to gain some perspective on the papers given at each panel, although since the topics ranged so widely, it was often difficult for the chairs to precis the material in the allotted time. Their remarks took either the form of a brief summary or were offered as a critique, as when Pierre Sorlin complained that the American scholars on the 'Reinterpretations' panel made too many connections with the Vietnam war.

One of the main underlying issues became apparent in the questions from the delegates. The issue of 'fakes' became central to the debate, with various speakers offering definitions, ranging from the derogatory – 'when it is bad' – to claims for 'authentic reconstruction'. It seemed, to those familiar with debates around realism or intentionality, that the question of what counts as evidence was more pertinent, and that a notion of history as a text with numerous possible readings could, coupled with audience research, broaden the field of enquiry.

The panel 'Reception', scheduled on the last day of the conference, promised to confront the issue of audience, and

Nicholas Hiley's paper on the British cinema audience in the period did go some way to underline the need to rethink the history of war propaganda, through accounting for the 'power of the audience'. The ensuing discussion raised questions about the cinema during the war as a gendered space, and the combination of theoretical perspectives with empirical research was an example of how the conference's goal of bringing film historians and historians together could work.

Other high points of the conference included the panels on the war on television, where the authorial voice in documentaries about the war produced by CBS and the BBC gave rise to questions of who owns history and of the role of genre in nationally accepted narratives. Papers such as Francesco Bono's, on World War I in the eyes of Italian television, dealt with the eternal presence of historical texts in different timeframes and contexts. It was hard not to feel that the 'discourses of postmodernism', to which Professor de Rooij had referred, might have some relevance here.

The conference on the whole did stay 'close to the ground' in that the papers were generally well researched and did not accentuate the kind of theoretical perspectives that might be expected at a film studies or cultural studies meeting. The best papers utilized factual information to open up avenues of inquiry and pointed to the need for ways of accounting for the cinematic experience. This was most evident in the study of areas not directly related to the war. The concept of war as subtext in seemingly unrelated entertainment films and the study of film narratives at a time of social trauma across Europe, certainly had a relevance for more than just the films of World War I. (This inevitably led to complaints that there was not enough talk about the war.) The less interesting approaches seemed to depend

on a conception of film as transparent evidence: a window into history.

The conference succeeded in bringing together contradictory and diverse methodologies, and the result was a well organised event which offered the opportunity for exchange and widened the scope of this interesting period of film history.

Michael Hammond

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1 Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (eds), *Dirty Looks: Essays on Pornography* (London: BFI, 1993).

2 Anna Douglas, 'Annie Sprinkle: post post porn modernist', *New Formations* no. 19 (1993), pp. 95–108.

3 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and the History of Laughter* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1963).

4 John Gange and Stephen Johnstone, "'Believe me, everybody has something pierced in California': an interview with Nayland Blake", *New Formations* no. 19 (1993), pp. 51–68.

The XVth International IAMHIST Conference, Film And The First World War, Amsterdam, 5–11 July 1993

The XVth International IAMHIST Conference, *Film And The First World War*, set out to bring together scholars from different disciplines, to present a survey of the field, and to discuss different points of view in the writing of European cinema history. The conference was designed initially to combine the project of the Domitor group, (the reexamination of 'traditional' film history) with IAMHIST (International Association of Media Historians) work on film propaganda between the years 1896–1920. As explained in the conference catalogue, the Amsterdam based Film Research Group (*Stichting Film en Wetenschap*, or SFW) then decided that this was too broad an area, and the conference proposal was narrowed down to focus on World War I. This subject drew the interest of scholars from areas outside those circumscribed by Domitor and IAMHIST, which broadened the scope of the conference but at the same time led to an atmosphere of creative anxiety.

This tension was evident at the outset. In his welcome address the Chairman of the IAMHIST Amsterdam 1993 Foundation, Piet de Rooij, noted how World War I battlefields had become tourist attractions and suggested that while 'we know what happened, we don't yet understand'. He called for work to find the real meaning of the event; meaning which would not be 'obscured by discourses of postmodernism and deconstruction'. A somewhat surprising

statement given that William Uricchio had argued in an article ('Coming soon . . .') written for the conference programme that the past has bound together disparate movements ranging from new historicism to the postmodern (as well as such generative discourses as poststructuralism) fueling the interrogation of established value systems, taste hierarchies, and notions of textuality and the viewer. In his call for methodologies that are 'theoretically challenging' and 'more critically self-conscious' Uricchio cited the interdisciplinarity of film and television studies, women's studies and cultural studies as the way forward. The stage was set for some debate around authenticity; indeed, the question of 'fakes' was a central theme in the conference, surfacing in the daily plenary sessions as well as in the diversity of papers and presentations.

The main conference was preceded by a panel entitled 'Love Stories in Fiction Films from France and Germany, 1911–1918'. The screening programme, held at the Netherlands Filmmuseum, interspersed documentary material from the museum's archive with films of love stories made before and during the war. The approaches of the four panelists ranged from textual analysis and theories of spectatorship to audience research. Marianne Lewinsky, for example, made connections between the German audiences for films such as *Heidenroschen* (Frans Hofer, 1916) and the largely female audience for novels with similar narrative characteristics. She argued that formally the film emphasizes visual style and music rather than cause and effect, raising questions about intertextuality across media as well as the multiplicity of possible readings around gender and national identity. The choice of films on the second day of this panel made it possible to discuss the impact of the war on films made during that period, which were not explicitly about the war.

The conference began in earnest the following day and was structured around three strands: National Experience and Trans-National Trade, Uses of Cinema in Wartime, and Framing the Great War. Each day was introduced by a keynote speaker and ended with a wrapping-up session in which brief comments were made about each paper by the chairs, and questions were taken from the floor. There were also special sections on The War on Television and Work in Progress. The international makeup of the presentations provided the opportunity for diverse methods to be compared and discussed, which was one of the stated goals of the conference but also presented problems of language and in the use of visual material. The end-of-day plenaries were useful in that there was a chance to gain some perspective on the papers given at each panel, although since the topics ranged so widely, it was often difficult for the chairs to precis the material in the allotted time. Their remarks took either the form of a brief summary or were offered as a critique, as when Pierre Sorlin complained that the American scholars on the 'Reinterpretations' panel made too many connections with the Vietnam war.

One of the main underlying issues became apparent in the questions from the delegates. The issue of 'fakes' became central to the debate, with various speakers offering definitions, ranging from the derogatory – 'when it is bad' – to claims for 'authentic reconstruction'. It seemed, to those familiar with debates around realism or intentionality, that the question of what counts as evidence was more pertinent, and that a notion of history as a text with numerous possible readings could, coupled with audience research, broaden the field of enquiry.

The panel 'Reception', scheduled on the last day of the conference, promised to confront the issue of audience, and

Nicholas Hiley's paper on the British cinema audience in the period did go some way to underline the need to rethink the history of war propaganda, through accounting for the 'power of the audience'. The ensuing discussion raised questions about the cinema during the war as a gendered space, and the combination of theoretical perspectives with empirical research was an example of how the conference's goal of bringing film historians and historians together could work.

Other high points of the conference included the panels on the war on television, where the authorial voice in documentaries about the war produced by CBS and the BBC gave rise to questions of who owns history and of the role of genre in nationally accepted narratives. Papers such as Francesco Bono's, on World War I in the eyes of Italian television, dealt with the eternal presence of historical texts in different timeframes and contexts. It was hard not to feel that the 'discourses of postmodernism', to which Professor de Rooij had referred, might have some relevance here.

The conference on the whole did stay 'close to the ground' in that the papers were generally well researched and did not accentuate the kind of theoretical perspectives that might be expected at a film studies or cultural studies meeting. The best papers utilized factual information to open up avenues of inquiry and pointed to the need for ways of accounting for the cinematic experience. This was most evident in the study of areas not directly related to the war. The concept of war as subtext in seemingly unrelated entertainment films and the study of film narratives at a time of social trauma across Europe, certainly had a relevance for more than just the films of World War I. (This inevitably led to complaints that there was not enough talk about the war.) The less interesting approaches seemed to depend

on a conception of film as transparent evidence: a window into history.

The conference succeeded in bringing together contradictory and diverse methodologies, and the result was a well organised event which offered the opportunity for exchange and widened the scope of this interesting period of film history.

Michael Hammond

reviews

review:

Jill Forbes, *The Cinema in France after the New Wave*, London: BFI and Macmillan, 1992; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 337 pp.

CHRISTINE SCOLLEN-JIMACK

This is a book to be welcomed. It is broad and ambitious in scope, covering a large number of directors and films with intelligence and accuracy and avoiding the trap of mere compilation. It makes easily available to an English-speaking reader much information that can only otherwise be gleaned by minute perusal of French cinema journals. Forbes does particularly well in setting the films in their specific French cultural context, stressing, quite rightly, 1968 as a watershed not just in politics but also in the cinema. She usefully brings to our attention some directors who are very little known on this side of the Channel, for instance Jean Eustache, Philippe Garrel, Jacques Doillon, André Techiné. It is of course a book which must have entailed agonizing choices. Since it is clearly impossible to deal exhaustively with the totality of output in France over the past twenty-five years, Forbes has had to construct her own canon, which some readers might be unwilling to accept. At least she is explicit about her criteria: 'Most of the filmmakers discussed here began their careers after 1968 in the period which might be defined as "post-nouvelle vague"'. This is why the reader will not find a detailed consideration of major filmmakers such as Bresson or Chabrol, Rivette, Resnais or Rohmer, since although these directors continued to make films in the 1970s *their period of innovative influence was over* (my italics). Certainly it is justifiable, and indeed necessary to include an extended discussion of Godard – whose continuing influence on the French cinema

cannot be overestimated. But smuggling in Truffaut who died in 1984, and whose later films can hardly be seen as constituting an 'innovative influence' seems rather dubious. And in terms of omissions, does Malle not rate more than the very brief discussion of *Lacombe Lucien* (1974)? Clearly any choice is arbitrary, and Forbes's defence of hers is not always entirely convincing.

The book is divided into two parts, *Genres* and *Auteurs*. The first part has a useful chapter on political and documentary cinema, containing an illuminating extended comparison between two films about factory occupation, Marin Karmitz's *Coup pour coup/Blow for Blow* (1972) and Godard's *Tout va bien* (1972). A further chapter looks at the influence of the USA and US films on the cinema in France, and in particular on the thriller, concentrating on three areas: the 'fetishist Polar' (with an extended discussion on the many vehicles for Belmondo and Delon); the political thriller (in particular the films of Costa-Gavras and Yves Boisset); and the postmodern thriller. Since Forbes chooses not to discuss Besson and Carax here, apparently on the grounds that they are well known and commercially successful, it might seem strange that she lavishes so much attention on Beineix, usually bracketed with them. No doubt, though, she has seen *Diva* (1981) as the archetypal postmodernist thriller. A particularly good chapter discusses women filmmakers, set against the background of the women's movement in France. Not surprisingly, much of the chapter is devoted to Varda, who has in the past had a somewhat mixed reception among feminist critics (she was condemned by Claire Johnston as bourgeois and reactionary) and to Marguerite Duras, the darling of critics, if not of audiences. There are, however, some strange absences and omissions. Whereas Coline Serreau's highly successful *3 Hommes et un couffin/3 Men and a Cradle* (1985) (which in its modest way does much to shake up sexual stereotypes) is mentioned, as is her earlier film *Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent/What Do They Want?* (1975), earning her an entry in the index, Diane Kurys's *Coup de foudre/At First Sight* (1984), surely a valuable contribution to the feminist debate, is ignored. Neither are the brief and dismissive references to her films elsewhere in the text picked up in the index.

And finally the auteurs. Despite the modern challenges to the concept, Forbes convincingly justifies its validity as far as the French cinema is concerned, and covers a lot of ground in this section, taking in both the popular and the avant garde. She solves the problem of the organization of her material by treating some auteurs grouped together by their thematic preoccupations, or general typology. Her chapter on the New History film traces the intellectual movement which was started by the *Annales*

school and given further impetus by the events of May 1968, and which attempted to 'rewrite history' from a different perspective; valorizing the regional, the popular, the oral, the collective memory. In the cinema, this gave rise to films like Allio's *Moi, Pierre Rivière* (1976), which was based on Foucault's discussion of a multiple murder in nineteenth-century Normandy. Her discussion of Allio's films in general is detailed and convincing, as is her section on Techné, in particular his 'history' film *Souvenirs d'en France* (1975). A 'thematic' chapter very plausibly discusses the films of Doillon and Pialat under the heading 'The Family in Question'. A broader heading 'In search of the Popular Cinema' encompasses two chapters, one devoted to Tavernier, and the other to New French Comedy, which treats Blier and Luc Moullet, a real unknown quantity for English-speaking audiences. On Tavernier, Forbes is thorough and discriminating. She obviously sees him as an important filmmaker, about whom she nevertheless has misgivings. Although she devotes a whole chapter to him, she undermines this by the very title, 'Bertrand Tavernier and the Return to the "Tradition de Qualité"', the term used with such scorn by Truffaut to condemn all that he detested in the French cinema of the 1950s. In fact she makes it clear that for her, Tavernier's impeccable liberal sentiments do not always compensate for his lack of formal inventiveness. When it comes to Blier, Forbes shares the general critical enthusiasm, stressing his links with the satirico-anarchist tradition of magazines like *Charlie-Hebdo* and *Hara-Kiri*, and the flourishing *café-théâtre* tradition of the 1970s, foregrounding his formal invention, and minimizing his overwhelming misogyny: an aspect of his films that is not easy, for any woman, let alone a feminist, to ignore or forgive. She would presumably justify this position by her general principle that filmmakers should be concerned not with changing society, but with changing the cinema. One might choose to disagree, but one of the strengths of this book is its firmly articulated point of view, even if one does not necessarily share it.

The detailed filmographies at the end of the book are helpful. Some errors in accounts of the films seem to have crept in: two brief examples concerning Varda's films. In *L'Une chante, l'autre pas/One sings, the other doesn't* (1977) Suzanne only has one husband – the divorced gynaecologist/paediatrician who appears near the end of the film. And the title of *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962), 'a film which remains the *locus classicus* of the use of real time', actually cheats a bit, since the film's running time is ninety minutes (not two hours as Forbes states), and we actually follow Cléo from five to six-thirty. The plates and captions throw up some problems. The caption on page 156 is incomplete (it is given correctly in the index of plates), and the plates on

pages 117 and 147 have been reversed. But these are minor reservations. This is a book which succeeds in conveying an immense amount of information, and packaging that information is an intelligent and often challenging way.

review:

Lester Friedman (ed.), *British Cinema and Thatcherism: Fires were Started* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 320 pp.

Duncan Petrie (ed.), *New Questions of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1992), 119 pp.

JANE SILLARS

As once again British cinema finds itself lauded abroad with Oscar success whilst critics at home ponder its very survival, it seems a good time to look at books from either side of the Atlantic which respectively celebrate and interrogate the nature of this fragile entity.

British Cinema and Thatcherism: Fires Were Started is an American collection containing an uneven mixture of overviews of the cinema of the period and studies of individual directors. Its somewhat portentous subtitle *Fires Were Started* refers to the explosion of creativity which Friedman detects in British cinema in the eighties. His contention is that 'the intense and unwavering hatred of Margaret Thatcher provided the spark necessary to force Britain's best visual artists to new creative heights and, in so doing, to ignite a moribund industry'. Given the evidence of the study of the industry in *New Questions of British Cinema* it might be more realistic to think of the British cinema not so much as a mighty conflagration carrying all before it, but rather as the scattered bonfires on the urban wasteland which fitfully illuminate *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (Stephen Frears, 1987) and *The Last of England* (Derek Jarman, 1988).

In a US collection addressing British film it is too easy to pick out simple errors. However, some mistakes are more serious and lead one to question the knowledge from which a piece is

written. When Manthia Diawara in his piece on the work of black film collectives writes of how 'the names of black people, such as Colin Roach, Blakelock, Cherry Groce, and Mrs Jarret, whose deaths are associated with the riots, have also come to symbolize black martyrdom in Britain', the inclusion of murdered white policeman Keith Blakelock (one wonders what he thought PC stood for?) can only make one question an article which professes itself concerned with 'the struggle over signs and images'.

The book seems most successful when the difference between cultures is acknowledged rather than when writers simply try to translate or transcend this difference. This disjuncture is perhaps most evident and most damning in the treatment of ethnicity. Although there are some honourable exceptions among the contributors, the failure of the editor to deal with the fact that the very concept of Britishness is problematic and contested is a serious failing in a book about British cinema.

Despite its awareness of race, and the inclusion of a welcome chapter on black cinema, for the most part issues of ethnicity seem pushed to the margins. Apart from Brian McIlroy's chapter on the treatment of Northern Ireland, this is a book chiefly about English cinema. This means that a whole spectrum of issues and opinions in intense conflict with Thatcherite notions of nationalism, and indeed of politics and society, remain unexplored. No collection of this kind can hope to be comprehensive, but some omissions are more disabling than others. In a book which is primarily concerned with the impact of Thatcherism, many writers rightly refer to the crushing of the unions as an important strand of her ideology, yet nowhere does this book mention Bill Douglas's flawed but ambitious *Comrades* (1986), an historical film about the struggle to establish workers' rights with enormous contemporary relevance.

In its methodology the bulk of the collection displays, from contributors who are in the main teachers of film, a distressing lack of attention to issues of spectatorship, address and audiences. The closeness of the relationship between film and television in Britain in the eighties would seem to demand that these questions around the specificity of film are raised, and indeed they are dealt with in some detail in Petrie's book. In Friedman's discussion of the book's methodology, he is chiefly concerned to defend its use of auteur theory. Leaving aside the complex of issues this raises, what struck me reading the collection is how often it makes more sense to think of the authorship of these films as residing with the writer – Ian McEwan's *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983), Alan Bennett's *A Private Function* (1984), Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1986), and Philip Ridley's *The Krays* (1990) – rather than the

director. By prejudging this problem of attribution, the book is unable to engage with the question this raises of how far British cinema is writer-led and what the effects of this might be on British filmmaking.

Some of the book's strongest sections are those which are unexpected, moving us away from the well-trodden paths of draughtsmen and ploughmen and the sound of chariots. Antonia Lant's article on Leeds Animation Workshop makes a strong case for recognizing the diversity of filmmaking within the period, as well as making connections of subject matter and style with more well-known practitioners in women's independent cinema.

At the heart of this collection lies the question of the nature of the relationship between British cinema and Thatcherism? Does cinema reflect or critique; does it act as commentary on or in opposition to this powerful political philosophy? How far are they related at all? In British television the relationship is strong and still ongoing. Thatcher's radical and all-encompassing ideology turned the movement for greater independent access to broadcasting from one promoting access and diversity in production into a Trojan horse within the television establishment, which may yet lead to the dismantling of the institution of public service broadcasting. Friedman's volume contains two interesting and inventive statements of this relationship. Peter Wollen argues that it was Thatcherism as a modernizing project which inspired the first and probably last New Wave of British cinema: 'a series of uncompromising films made by original, oppositional, visually oriented auteurs'. Thomas Elsaesser in a wide-ranging and closely argued piece makes connections between the development of cinema and the growth of a Thatcherite 'image culture'. Elsaesser shows how, throughout British cinema history, patriotism and the projection of national myths have been integral to its success, and proceeds to distinguish between the 'national imaginary' for sale on the international market of cinema and an indigenous 'social imaginary' available through television.

One of the central questions raised in Duncan Petrie's collection *New Questions of British Cinema* is this troubled relationship between cinema and television, the medium which has been the lifeblood of film in Britain for the last decade. This volume sets out to examine the problems and structural weaknesses of the British film industry and in so doing tackles a range of issues, going beyond production to look at the important, but often neglected areas of distribution and marketing. The missing audience whose absence is felt in Friedman's text-based collection is considered here, most notably in Colin MacCabe's contribution. MacCabe exposes how part of the significance of television funding for the cinema ecology in

Britain has been to reintroduce a sense of the importance of its audience. He also takes strong exception to Ben Gibson's attempt in the same volume to distinguish between film and television as modes of production. Gibson argues for a cinema which will 'provoke national debates about cultural identity', claiming that at the moment 'we have a cinema based on old paperback novels somebody liked, and television which is often, and popularly, about our everyday lives'. MacCabe accepts the existence of differences but wants 'to deny any *absolute* oppositions or hierarchies' as well as to celebrate rather than supplant the inventiveness of British television.

As this exchange suggests, this collection lives up to its intent to be both provocative and more discursive than the current BFI monographs, although it is similar in scope. As well as querying the nature of cinema in Britain and whether a film industry as such remains here, the collection usefully interrogates the notion of Britishness. John Hill, in an interesting essay, draws on the newer understandings of national identity not as unified and monolithic, but as dynamic and open to redefinition. By these means he seeks to counter the fear that a national cinema would be necessarily narrow or homogenizing. With his use of the example of black British cinema, the case for the existence of a national cinema therefore becomes part of a broader attempt to reintroduce the idea of diversity into media production, rather than locating it solely in reception, as has been the case with much recent theory.

The volume is appropriately named as it certainly raises more questions than it answers. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's final article on the difficulties of researching the British film industry leaves a suitably open ending in his plea for more information to ensure that the future of the industry can be studied – even if the result is to find that its proposed future is illusory. This collection should be commended for its move to widen the scope of the debate; for its attempts to be more specific about the terms around which these debates take place; and to challenge some of the orthodoxies which have encrusted them.